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Interacting With Television: Morning Talk-TV and its  
Communicative Relationship with Women Viewers.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a unique interdisciplinary approach to gender and mass communication within the field of media and cultural studies. It evolves from a trend in media research that understands broadcasting as a communicative event which involves the creation of new and different forms of social action and interaction in a modern world (Meyrowitz, 1985; Thompson, 1995; Scannell, 1989; 1991; Moores, 2000).

It investigates women's involvement with television discourse concentrating on morning talk programming in Britain which presents a concentration of talk shows and magazine programmes. These programmes are chosen specifically because in dealing with issues that are usually contained within the personal and private domain they often privilege the voices of 'ordinary' people and women in particular. It is argued that their personalised stylistic features produce textual strategies which position the viewer as also 'participator'.

The research also involves a, broadly speaking, 'ethnographic' approach, viewing programmes with women in their homes and recording their responses alongside the text. This original methodology produces an analysis of text/audience interaction that concentrates on the motivation of a particular style of 'feminine' discourse, which can articulate the personal and private. As such, I emphasise the importance of the women's voices in the construction of the viewing experience which uniquely establishes a 'mediated conversational floor'. The research finds that

through the interaction encouraged by the texts, the women respond producing their own relevant subjective experience that is significant as a modern phenomenon of self-reflexivity and identity construction.



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## Introduction

### *Origins*

#### *'It's Good to Talk'*

This is the British Telecom advertising slogan which frames the British morning magazine programme, *This Morning*, during the phase of this study (1996-1998). The phrase has also become one of the most popular common sense truisms of contemporary Western culture. Deborah Cameron's (2000) recent book of the same title takes issue with the rise of such a tenet's regulatory intervention in many areas of our personal and professional lives whereby, "good communication is said to be the key to a better and happier life; improving communication 'would improve everything else'" (2000:1). However, Cameron locates this phenomena as a part of the reflexive project of the self characteristic of modernity (Giddens, 1991) whereby 'communication' has become the latest subject of self-government.

'Talk', or more popularly 'chat', has also emerged as a dominating genre across television schedules:- interview chat shows, the audience participatory talk shows, therapy-style talk shows, morning magazine programmes as well as an increasing spread of conversation across more formal news and current affairs programmes. The rise of these forms has been seen as a symptom of an overwhelming tide of tabloid American cultural forms swamping British programming:

Chat's winning across a number of TV formats, including documentaries. Chat has fast become the style of Nineties TV which is going more and more downmarket, more like American television.

(John Corner quoted in *The Scotsman* 24/7/96)

On British terrestrial television for most of the 1990s, there was, and still is, a concentration of talk based programming between 9am - 12 noon, the mid-morning slot. Between 1996-1998, the duration of this research, the programme mix consisted of magazine programmes and audience participation talk shows. Whilst talk shows in general have been described as targeting 'women demographics' (Shattuc, 1997), this particular period of the day on terrestrial television is marked out as produced for housewife-consumers, despite an increasingly changing demographic of students, retired people and home-workers.

Critiques of talk shows in general have produced wildly polar evaluations of the genre; from suggesting talk shows as the worst kind of cheap, voyeuristic spectacle, to considering it as a potentially progressive space for exercising (sometimes feminist) democracy. Here the genre's appearance in many guises, with differing hybrid forms and staging of multiple voices has lead to its characterisation as a particularly postmodern phenomenon which resists conventional definition (Munson,1993). Postmodern features of television aesthetics apparently include: electronic bricolage, self-reflexiveness, paradox, ambiguity and the blurring of genre, style and history (Barker, 2000). As hybridity and fast-montage pilot the future of the zapping context of multi-channel television, whereby the non-linear narrative of *Twin Peaks* or the intertextuality of *The Simpsons* intrigue the media analyst, it might be easy to forget that there are still contemporary and popular television texts that seem relatively unremarkable in these terms. Whilst it is indeed difficult to track ideological 'meaning' in the daily iteration of the talk show, and the US

versions do seem to present a spectacle of parody, the British morning shows have received journalistic attention for their recourse to the mundane rather than the spectacular:

It is Stupidvision - where most of the presenters look like they have to pretend to be stupid because they think their audience is. In other words, it patronises. It talks to the vacuum cleaner and the washing machine and the microwave, without much contact with the human brain.

(Polly Toynbee 1996, *Radio Times*)

In the 1990s, the programmes that filled this slot were *This Morning* (ITV), *Good Morning* (BBC1), *Kilroy* (BBC1), *The Time...The Place* (ITV) and *Vanessa* (ITV). As with the US versions of talk programming, they provide ways of audience participation, but the 'ordinary' people that populate the British morning shows are not 'men who say they've had 4,000 lovers', or 'women who need to tell her partners that they're really men' - a style which has been described as 'bringing the margins to the centre' (Joyner-Priest, 1995). Rather, the 'ordinary' voices on British programmes are women who have had operations that have gone wrong, or women who have undergone IVF treatment, or husbands who have left them, or men who are paying for the care of their elderly parents - more 'everyday' matter for discussion. As one media commentator describes the *This Morning* show:

[...] it was a revolutionary concept in television. It was about the way ordinary people live their lives: their heartbreaks their worries and medical problems, their joys, their setbacks and recoveries; in short, their everydayness. (Jaci Stephen, *Media Guardian* 1996)

One cannot ignore that the popular accusation of 'banality' is a reference to the domestic, private topics that dominate the talk. The prevalence of women's voices and women's



issues raises a debate about the value of the private sphere in televised discussion. Are these programmes positively airing the kinds of issues that feminists have argued have been traditionally silenced by the masculine public sphere? If so, are the voices of women solicited in ways that feminists might approve? The jury on the talk show apparently is still out. However, there is one constant factor - these programmes encourage, facilitate and broadcast talk and 'talk' has long been at the centre of feminist concerns. In the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s women were encouraged to speak to each other, to speak of the 'problem' that had no name and at the same time women's talk was often derided and ridiculed as gossip, prattle, bitching whining etc.. In the 1990s therefore, we have a similar, but particularly modern, debate occurring about the *televising* of mundane talk.

To analyse a film or a fictional drama, one would automatically investigate the devices of the narrative. When it comes to talk programming therefore, does it not make sense to analyse the talk of 'Talk TV'? There is a further dimension to television talk that requires attention. It is also talk that is mediated and broadcast to absent others, and talk programming utilises a good deal of direct address to the audience at home. These programmes can be understood as part of an increased 'personalisation' that some academics argue has become increasingly characteristic of the media's domestic significance (Silverstone, 1994). Is it not necessary to research to whom these programmes talk and how indeed that talk is received? One cannot therefore undertake textual analysis or audience research without some other tools with which to analyse the structure of this 'talk' phenomenon. As Dell Hymes points out for research in other contexts:

Interpretation that excludes speech falls short, as would a treatment of painting that excludes paint.  
(1981:9)

Therefore, in this thesis, I need to complement traditional approaches to media with other paradigms that offer a rigorous investigation into speech. The research is interdisciplinary, taking on board elements of feminist sociolinguistic research, pragmatics, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

In this thesis I will explore the relationship between talk on TV, talk about TV and talk *with* TV. I will suggest that these programmes attempt to construct a 'pseudo-interactive' relationship with the audience at home, but also that most of the traditional forms of inquiry used in media research cannot help an analysis of broadcasting in these terms, since rarely do we think about the ways mass communications and interpersonal communications influence each other. Therefore, my research initiative is twofold: How do these 'feminine', talk-based genres, in their recourse to the everyday, establish a communicative strategy with a female audience and how does a female audience respond to its conversational address at the *moment* of viewing?

### *Outline of chapters*

In Chapter One of this thesis therefore I intend to map the terrain of feminist communication research and suggest an approach that transgresses boundaries of research by bringing together concerns about the mass media with those about speech communication. Chapter Two offers an account of language debates within cultural studies

and returns our attention to the cultural significance of speech. It also outlines feminist debates about speech and gender and argues for a consideration of the media's role in gendered speech production. In Chapter Three, I discuss the rise of daytime talk programming and the popular and academic debates that have arisen around this phenomenon, suggesting a move from evaluative judgements to a more critical focus on the talk itself. In Chapter Four, I search for a methodology to procure an exploration of the daily occurrence of mediated interaction in the modern age. This leads to the analysis of these texts in Chapter Five in terms of their construction as 'communicative events' that registers their specific 'communicative intentionality' (Scannell, 1991b). Chapter Six develops a methodology for researching the audience and finds ways of investigating the concept of 'para-social interaction' (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Chapter Seven presents the findings from my interviews and focus group with women who watch morning television and finally Chapter Eight analyses the women's para-social engagements with the text.

Overall, the thesis intends to investigate a particularly gendered 'communicative event' which finds alternative methods of media analysis. The research therefore represents my journey through different academic fields in order to explore this particular mediated relationship where the televising of a feminised personal talk interacts with women in their domestic material environment. It makes insights into how the broadcasting of gendered talk about the personal and the everyday is actually invested in the realities of a group of women's lived everyday and into the effect that this has upon the construction of gendered identities. What happens as these communicative subjects come together in a discursive event?

# Chapter 1

## Feminist Media and Communication Studies

### Introduction

In this opening chapter I will explore the terrain that can generally here be conceived of as 'feminist media and communication studies' within which I situate my own research. Because this is a large interdisciplinary field, I cannot address all its facets, but I will mark out the territory that leads me to my own position. Therefore, I begin by considering feminist media studies and feminist communication studies, as they have grown almost distinctively, characterised by their European and American influences respectively. I then chart the contribution of feminists working within cultural studies to the development of the field and contrast their findings with those working within feminist film theory that offers a distinctive psychoanalytic rendering of gendered subject positions. I will also consider the space opened up by feminist researchers who insist on the importance of understanding women audiences. Finally, within this chapter, I will begin to mark out where my research moves into new ground through its focus on genre, audience and speech patterns - in this way addressing the call to bring together mass communications research with research into interpersonal communication.

### 1.1 Feminist media studies

The mass media has long been central to feminist concerns. Some of the most influential writing in feminist history finds the media at the centre of debates about women's oppression and subordination. These include Betty Friedan's classic *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971) that attack



the media's power in reinforcing patriarchal myths about limited, stereotypical roles for women in society. More contemporary popular feminist writing is still criticising the media as a sexist institution that contributes to the inequality women experience daily. For instance, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) highlights the media's obsessions with the female form as contributing to the growing problem of anorexia among young women. Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) describes the media's hand in the 1980s and 1990s in perpetuating the myth that the feminist movement is redundant and that so called gender equality is not the utopia women once thought. But also, contemporary research has seen some reconsideration of newer media forms, such as television programmes *Cagney and Lacey* or *Roseanne*, as being produced from the context of the gains of the feminist movement with depictions of strong, independent and potentially liberated women. Lumby (1997) argues that we need not always consider the media as hostile to women in contemporary society and indeed many interventions from within cultural studies have taken this view.

I locate this research project within this broad, vastly expanding field which has relatively recently been documented as 'feminist media studies' (Van Zoonen, 1994). In addition, there are a number of articles that theorise a history of feminist criticism in media research (Steeves 1987, Kaplan 1987, Brunsdon, 1993). Though arguments as to what constitutes a particularly *feminist* agenda in media research have ensued, the wider discipline of media studies is significantly influenced by research into gender and the media. Feminist questions around gender and cultural production and consumption have emerged as central to the field of media studies, dealing with production issues related to ideology, power and genre as well as being concerned with the politics of

domestic reception within the private realm of the home. This makes it difficult to extract a feminist history of the field from media studies as a whole.

However, various contributions have indicated that there is a continually emerging canon of research which can be described as 'feminist media studies': the early *Women Take Issue* (1978) by the C.C.C.S, Baehr and Gray (eds.) *Turning It On: A reader in Women and Media* (1996), as well as a particular focus on feminist concerns about television, Baehr and Dyer's (eds.) *Boxed in: Women and Television* (1987), Brown (ed.) *Television and Women's Culture* (1990) and more recently Brunsdon, D'Acci and Spiegel's *Feminist Television Criticism* (1997). Much of the problem in distinguishing a 'feminist' media studies from the wider research field is that it is dependant on a number of disciplines, the boundaries of which are, by design and intent, somewhat blurred. Van Zoonen (1994) pulls together work from the influential fields of cultural studies, film theory, communication studies and of course media studies in her book and it is with reference to such a useful text that I attempt a similar introduction here.

## **1.2 Feminist communication studies**

Research into gender and communication, particularly in the United States, traditionally organises itself around 'communication studies', a loose umbrella term under which various facets of communication are subsumed. Collections which draw feminist work together under this heading, include Rakow (1992) and Creedon (1989a). Unlike the British field, research interests are largely divided into two areas: speech communication and mass communication, each of which emerged with distinct paths of development and inquiry. Rakow (1992) suggests that the demarcation of these two sectors is a weakness, an issue which is crucial to the theoretical project underpinning

this research and which I will engage with later in the concluding sections in this chapter.

Work characterised as belonging to the strand of 'mass communications' focuses on the structural gender inequalities in place within the media industries as a whole. For instance, Gallagher (1980) and Baehr (1981) point to the gross under representation of women working in decision-making positions within media corporations. The recognition of institutionalised inequality subsequently led to 'campaigning for change'. Later, due to changes in gendered employment patterns, Creedon (1989b) updates this research by calling for a 're-vision' of feminist writing in the mass communication field, given the 'gender-switch' which has been observable in the industry whereby more and more women are training as journalists and producers. Undoubtedly one must observe this so called 'gender-switch' critically, since what appears to be happening is that women are allowed to enter only certain sectors of media industries. Thus public relations and children's programming, arguably extensions of women's domestic roles, constitute what Creedon refers to as 'pink collar ghettos'. As is apparent in most research on women's employment, the 'feminisation' of professions also corresponds with their devaluation.

Speech communication on the other hand refers to the dynamics of interpersonal communication in various contexts. It explores the differences between feminine and masculine styles of speech as well as engaging with issues of power in conversational practices, within personal relationships and in institutionalised spaces such as the courtroom or the doctor's surgery (e.g. Zimmerman and West, 1975, Tannen, 1990 and



Goodwin, 1990) This tradition will receive more detailed discussion in Chapter Two of this thesis.

### **1.3 Media content**

In both Europe and the US, fundamental concerns for feminists are also reflected in an interest in the media's output, rather than its structural, institutional organisation.

Attention therefore turns to the theorising of the problematic ways in which women are represented in the media. This reflects feminism's broadening scope in its analysis of areas that might previously have been considered secondary to 'serious' political discussion. Feminist attentions to the import of the micropolitical structure in the maintenance of patriarchy place the critique of representation at the forefront of debates in media studies. Henley states that:

From its beginnings, feminism has regarded ideas, language and images as crucial in shaping women's and men's lives. (1985:2)

The focus in media studies therefore turns to the analysis of imagery produced by a male dominated media, arguing that images of women have traditionally been the province and property of men.<sup>1</sup> In response to a perceived imbalance in gendered representations, feminist researchers have embarked upon content analyses of various media products: for example news (Miller, 1975) commercials (Thoveron, 1986), and general advertising (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971) which produced factual documentation on the narrow stereotyping of women's roles in the media as

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<sup>1</sup> Borzello, Kuhn, Pack and Wed (1985).

housewives, mothers and whores.<sup>2</sup> This sex-role research has proved most useful for feminist interventions into the production values of the media industries.

Concerns about media content within feminist studies are also focused on the media's contribution to 'socialisation'. In this theoretical perspective the formation of gender roles is dependant upon social construction (Oakley, 1975) and gendered patterns are learned through various institutions such as the family, education and the media.

Questions have been raised into connections between the images of themselves women are presented with by the media and the way they live out their daily lives. Much of this research belongs to the 'effects' tradition of research or to 'cultivation theory' in which it is assumed that exposure to the media over time can have an effect upon attitudes and behaviour. Tuchman went as far as to suggest that, "girls exposed to 'television women' may hope to be homemakers when they are adults, but not workers outside the home" (1978:2).

Van Zoonen (1994) refers to a number of such correlations made by feminist researchers in the 1970s and 1980s who were concerned with the 'effects' and influence of the media upon women. She categorises such assertions as "feminist transmission views of communication" (1994:35) and suggests that these theorists are appropriating a functionalism in which "the media reflect society's dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles" (1994:17). Brunsdon (1993) describes this type of research into the dangers of media effects, as usually consisting of 'transparent' readings by feminist

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<sup>2</sup> For a summary of this type of research and some of its problems see Janus, N. Z. (1977) 'Research on sex roles in the mass media: toward a critical approach' in *The Insurgent Sociologist* 7, 19-32, reprinted in Baehr and Gray (eds.) 1996.

scholars who employ a notion of a shared understanding of sisterhood through which feminists assume that they understand what is best for women. It is generally associated with a liberal-feminist approach to instigating change.

#### 1.4 Feminist cultural studies

The analysis of media content has however, taken other directions. In Britain, in the 1970s, a group of researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies began to make some feminist interventions into Marxist theories of ideology. In *Women Take Issue* (1978) the authors attacked the 'invisibility' of women in the existing work within cultural studies that concentrated mainly on male working class oppression (e.g. Willis, 1977). The Women's Group however, retained the emphasis on class in their work and produced an approach to the media that depended upon a version of Marxist-feminism. Thus their research understood the workings of media messages upon receivers in terms of the Althusserian model of 'interpellation', a mechanism within the hegemonic function of media texts which hails individuals as subjects.<sup>3</sup> This explains the media's ideological significance in presenting the inequalities of capitalism and patriarchy as both necessary and natural. These theories were indebted to Gramsci's concepts of 'hegemony' where consent of the masses is won by subtle coercion.<sup>4</sup>

Althusser thus explains the media's role as an ideological apparatus of the state which plays a part in maintaining the status quo. This particularly socialist approach to a feminist analysis of the media's ideological operations is evident in Winship's early work on women's magazines:

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<sup>3</sup> Althusser, L (1971) Ideological State Apparatus. In Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.



Although it is the representations of femininity in *Woman* that I am engaging with, these general features extend outside the terrain. The ideology of femininity as it is constructed through patriarchal capitalist determinations must always be seen both in relation to its over determinations by 'masculinity' and as it is simultaneously included but set apart from the capitalism of the 'free' individual. Ideologically women, as women, whatever, their actual place in production are negatively placed within the social relation of re/production. (1978:136)

Within this theoretical approach, popular culture can be understood as a site whereby the dominant order can seek to win and maintain consent (McRobbie, 1982) and thus some feminists have embarked upon ideological analyses of media texts aimed at women (e.g. Holland, 1983 and McRobbie, 1991). Much of this work on the ideological significance of media texts draws its analytical tools from the theoretical assumptions of semiology and structuralism. Barthes' (1957) exposition of 'myth' provides a model for reading textual signs at two levels: denotation and connotation. Thus McRobbie's reading of *Jackie* sees, for instance, the significance of the hair colour of the female characters - dark hair signifying evil and blond hair symbolising virtue. The textual features of the media come under scrutiny as feminist researchers seek to expose the ideological messages encoded within them.

### **1.5 Feminist film theory**

So far I have discussed the intervention of feminists in the wider structures of media organisations and described the movement towards considering the importance of the content of individual texts under different theoretical paradigms. However, the importance of the word 'text' to refer to media output becomes most critical in the consideration of film theory. I will discuss the work in feminist film theory here since it

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<sup>4</sup> See Gramsci, A (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci.

is important to contrast this approach to textual analysis with that of work mentioned earlier in cultural studies.

Feminist film theory takes its direction from the pioneering essay by Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). Here, Mulvey provided the framework for a feminist analysis of film which deals with the act of watching as spectatorship, critiquing Hollywood film as being directed through 'the male gaze'. This work was crucial to the field. Using Freudian psychoanalytic theory she demonstrated how the workings of patriarchy are embedded in pleasures of popular cinema. Berger in his critique of art remarked that "[...]men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (1972:47). Similarly, Mulvey described the gaze applied in Hollywood cinema as male, whereby the director and camera construct a male subject position which offers both voyeuristic and fetishistic pleasures.

In this matrix the concept of a male spectator operated in two ways. Firstly, voyeuristic pleasures are fulfilled through the objectification of the image creating a distance between the objectified (woman) and the spectator (man). Mulvey appropriates Freud's phrase - 'scopophilia'<sup>5</sup> - to describe this voyeuristic process whereby the active masculine gaze is powerful and controlling over the passivity of the image. However, whilst "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking [...] it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect" (1992:25). In other words, while voyeurism produces the objectification of the image, the second function produces a narcissistic identification with it. This is dependent upon Lacan's theory of

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<sup>5</sup> Originally in Freud's 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality'.

'the mirror phase'<sup>6</sup> in which he illustrated the formation of identity when the child originally recognises itself as a separate entity in the world. This is vital to the constitution of the ego, as Mulvey pointed out:

It is the birth of a long love affair/despair between the image and the self image which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience. (1992:25/6)

Of central importance to a *feminist* film theory is Mulvey's stress on the sexing of the subject in this theory:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. (1992:27)

This confirms earlier feminist writing about male control of the female image whereby femininity is constructed in accordance with male 'phantasy'. What feminist film theory adds to the debate is the conceptualisation of subject positions as determined by the text.

Subsequent work in this field has called some of Mulvey's assertions into question, though it all takes her theorisation of the 'subject' as the starting point. Mulvey herself in 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1989) brings to the discussion the possibility of theorising a female spectator position in her consideration of the active female protagonist in the film *Duel In The Sun*. She concludes that there is

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<sup>6</sup> Lacan (1977)



no space for a true female spectator position but instead the spectator is subject to an impossible 'phantasy of masculinisation' whereby the only possible identification available to the female subject is to assume the position of a transvestite in male clothing. This is the main point with which other film theorists have taken issue. de Lauretis (1984) claims that female identification is much more complicated than Mulvey suggests and that a female spectator is always involved in a 'double identification' with both the passive object and the active subject position. Mary Ann Doane (1992) replaces Mulvey's active/passive dichotomy with the dynamic of proximity/distance.<sup>7</sup> With this apparatus it is possible to understand the implausibility of a feminine identification with the objectified image because the female spectator is too close to the image:

It is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference. For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image - she *is* the image. (1992:231)

Doane suggests that the existence of female identification is possible only through the concept of 'masquerade', whereby over-identification is made bearable by the distancing of a mask. Thus, Doane claims that the female spectator is in a more powerful position than Mulvey originally allowed since she can manipulate the image through the masquerading of excessive femininity.

Another of the other major critiques of female spectatorship comes from Jackie Stacey's 'Desperately Seeking Difference' (1992) which discusses the possibility of a homo-

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<sup>7</sup> Which she draws from Christian Metz ( Summer 1975), 'The Imaginary Signifier' *Screen* Vol. 16 , no 2.



erotic identification in the films *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*. These films both centre on one woman's obsession with another and Stacey thus elaborates a theory whereby a female spectator can be the active bearer of the look if one recognises the presence of desire. She claims that desire had previously been excluded from other theoretical conceptions of female identification and concluded that the "rigid distinction between *either* desire or identification, so characteristic of psychoanalytic film theory, fails to address the construction of desires which involves a specific interplay of both processes" (1992:256). Thus within feminist film theory conceptualisations of subject positions have shifted from concentrating on the controlling presence of the patriarchal male gaze to considering the politics of a potential female spectator. Within cultural studies the theorisation of female viewing is also of central concern, however the two fields are not comfortably aligned with each other which requires explanation in a later section of this chapter.

## **1.6 Gender and genre**

Interest in female viewing leads to a feminist concern with 'feminine' media forms. Certain genres such as melodrama, soap opera and romantic fiction, which are generally thought to target women, have attracted much critical attention and feminists have engaged in debates about women's consumption of various kinds of (particularly popular) media. In a common-sense equation which typically situates women with children as the most duped and naive groups at risk from the media's mind-numbing effects, feminist research in this area has been largely concerned with exploding popular myths about women's allegedly 'passive' consumption of popular media forms. This can be understood within a wider feminist project to 'rescue' women's practices and culture from invisibility or derision.

The concept of gendered genre-preference is a point which has been well documented empirically in cultural studies audience research (Morley 1986, Gray 1992). In Morley's study of family consumption of television, he observes the consistency of a gendered division of programme preferences:

My respondents displayed a notable consistency in this area, whereby masculinity was primarily identified with a strong preference for factual programmes (news, current affairs, documentaries) and femininity identified with a preference for fictional programmes.  
(1986:162)

Gray (1992) made similar observations about the gendered preferences for different genres of film - women prefer genres based on 'emotion', love stories and melodrama, whilst men prefer factual or 'hard' genres such as the action adventure or science fiction. This does seem a rather banal distinction, as Morley suggests, and is qualified in both accounts by some contradictions which seem to be influenced by other social factors such as education and class. Nevertheless, the importance of understanding this pattern of gendered distinctions in media consumption has been constantly reiterated in feminist media research.

Feminists have therefore sought to analyse such 'gynocentric genres' (Kuhn 1987:339) in an attempt to understand the gender specific appeal of certain media forms. In such research "one of the defining generic features of the women's picture as a textual system is its construction of narratives motivated by female desire and processes of spectator identification governed by a female point of view"(1987:339). The study of soap opera for instance, has progressed from a ridiculed object of study to a central topic of



academic thought (Brunsdon, 1993). Textual analyses of soaps have produced a coding of the characteristics that form 'women-centred' narratives. These include having no genesis or conclusion, intertwining plots, numerous characters, serial progress and semi-resolutions (e.g. Cantor and Pinigree, 1983, Brunsdon, 1981 and Geraghty, 1990.) Modleski even suggests that such features in themselves have a feminist appeal:

Indeed I would like to argue that soap operas are not altogether at odds with an already developing, though still embryonic, feminist aesthetics. (1982:105)

The specificities of the aesthetics of the text in terms of its gendered appeals are crucial to my own analysis of the textual construction of morning television which I argue is one of the most obviously gendered spaces remaining on the terrestrial schedule. In Chapter Five of this thesis I analyse the formats of mid-morning television in terms of their gendered modes of address.

As we have seen, the interest in genre in feminist film theory converges here with 'media studies' in the concern with the textual gendering of difference. However, the emphasis of film theory is to adopt psychoanalytic accounts to consider the formation of gendered subject positions generated by the text. This emphasis on a universal spectator/subject has received much criticism, especially from writers working in cultural studies, for its inability to theorise the cultural and historic specificity of subjectivity. Film theory relies on a symbolic determination of gender explicit within a psychoanalytic framework, which is criticised for its essentialism since it makes no attempt to account for a socially gendered, rather than a symbolically sexed subjectivity.

Mary Ann Doane illustrates the difference between film theory's concept of the subject as opposed to cultural studies' notion of women audiences:

I have never thought of the female spectator as synonymous with the woman sitting in front of the screen, munching her popcorn [...] The female spectator is a concept, not a person.  
(1989:142)<sup>8</sup>

As such, the psychoanalytic position has also been problematised by black feminists as it has traditionally ignored the fact that the 'right to look' is also a racially coded privilege. This is ultimately affected by racial inequality and the specific historical construction of sexualised racial stereotypes (e.g. Gaines, 1988; hooks, 1992 and Young, 1996).

Approaches from cultural studies however have been more eager to investigate the female viewer as a social entity. Brunsdon's '*Crossroads*: Notes on Soap Opera' (1981) located the text within a social context by explaining the appeal of soap opera within the context of women's lives. She connects the textual dynamics of soap to the lived cultural spaces which women inhabit and introduced the concept of 'cultural competence' whereby she suggests that viewing pleasure is determined by a socially constituted understanding of the discourses of the text. These are knowledges related to the textual features of the genre and the serial which depend upon a "cultural knowledge of the socially accepted codes and conventions for the conduct of personal life" (1981:10). Thus she suggested that soap opera's gendered appeal is contingent upon the culturally constructed skills associated with femininity and the management of

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<sup>8</sup> From Doane (1989) untitled entry, *Camera Obscura*, 20/21:142-7, this shortened extract comes from Stacey (1994:23).



the personal sphere. Brunsdon acknowledged her debt to Modleski (1979) who had argued earlier that the many narratives of soap opera demand a multiple identification that positions the viewer as a kind of 'ideal mother'. What these studies signify is the venturing beyond the text into the social space of the reader - an excursion that sits in contrast to the textually inscribed subject positions of film studies.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.7 Feminism and audience studies

A number of binary distinctions therefore ensue from the contrast between film theory and cultural studies. These, rather crudely, include text versus context, film versus television and psychoanalytic theory versus empirical ethnography<sup>10</sup>. Feminist cultural studies has thus turned towards more sociologically grounded investigations into audiences. Its object of research is not the theorisation of the *subject* but the investigation of the *audience* as it lives and consumes in the process of daily life. The shift is part of what has become known as 'the ethnographic turn' (Moore, 1993) within media studies as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Within this shift, audience members are recognised as more actively involved in the creation of meaning at their juncture with the text, rather than as straightforwardly interpellated by the meaning contained within the text (what is referred to as the textual determinism of film theory). Whilst this is territory also charted by the wider discipline of media and cultural studies, it is important to note that the work of feminist scholars is significant to this development. As Van Zoonen points out:

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<sup>9</sup> More recently, Jackie Stacey (1994) has drawn the positions of film theory and cultural studies together in her research on female spectators of the stars of Hollywood cinema in the 1940s and 1950s as she pays particular attention to the influence of historical context.

<sup>10</sup> Stacey outlines a table of distinctions between the contrasting paradigms of film studies and cultural studies (1994:24).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Six of this thesis.

The ample acknowledgement of Ien Ang's (1985) and Janice Radway's (1984) work on the interpretative activities of audiences of soaps and romance respectively, shows that feminist media research has certainly played a part in this reconceptualisation of the field. (1994:27)

With regard to television studies in particular, Brunsdon acknowledges, "we could identify the feminist contribution to television research in the last fifteen years, in its most widely accepted form, to be the gendering of two key concepts, that of genre and that of audiences" (1993:311).

Feminist audience studies chart the various ways in which media texts are incorporated into women's lives. Far from understanding women as the stereotyped passive dupes of popular discourse, much feminist empirical research has led to a re-evaluation of women's consumption of the mass media. From early work at the C.C.C.S. into the culture of working class women at home (Hobson, 1978), television and radio emerged as functionally integral to women's daily lives. Given that Ann Oakley's studies into housework (1974a) and the 'housewife' (1974b) stressed that the most oppressive features of the life of a housewife are daily isolation, loneliness and structurelessness, Hobson (1980) accounted for the ways in which the media is used as an instrumental tool in combating these pressures. The women in her study described how a radio disc jockey can be responsible for "the function of providing the missing 'company' of another person" (1980:107) and how the scheduling of radio and television programming can help the women organise their time. Similarly in the US, Seiter et al's (1989) work on American housewives showed that daytime soap operas help to structure the working day. Modleski's (1983,1984) continuation of her earlier work suggested that it is not only the scheduling of soap opera which is appealing to women's



daily lives but also the form itself in its cyclical and fragmented structure which is recognisable to women at home. She stated that, "the formal properties of daytime television thus accord closely with the rhythm of women's work in the home" (1984:102). Thus we can begin to envisage how textual properties are interwoven into the fabric of daily life.

Given the domestic context of television, it is hardly surprising that feminists embraced this turn to the viewing context, which is consistent with established traditions in feminist research into theorising the (micro)politics of the home. Researching women in the home has proved central to an ethnographic approach to female audiences. Interviewing women and talking to them about their reading and viewing practices has brought into focus the various ways which women consume the media. Some of these key projects are now something of a canon in feminist television research.

For example, Radway's research on *Reading the Romance* (1984) analysed the relationship between the textual properties of the romance novel and the reading strategies of the women in her study. The generic conventions of the romance text involve the inevitable restoration of the heroine's identity, and therefore happy resolution, via the heterosexual marriage contract which conforms to traditional patriarchal myths about Western romance. However, what is revealing in Radway's research is how the women readers made use of these features in their daily experience of marital and familial relationships. All of the women in her study were reading between one and five books each week and she concludes that they make use of the romance novel as a way of finding their own space within households that are constantly demanding their time. Using Chodorow's (1978) psychoanalytic theory of



mothering, Radway suggested that these women receive some kind of nurturing from the novels that they, as the prime nurturers themselves, are not afforded within the dynamics of patriarchal familial relations.

Angela McRobbie's (1991) research on teenage girls' consumption of popular culture made similar interpretations of young women's use of magazines and pop music to combat the class-based and oppressive features of school.<sup>12</sup> Ien Ang's (1985) study *Watching Dallas* suggested that the women who responded to her advert as viewers of Dallas, gained emotional value from a series they were evaluating in terms of its 'emotional realism' rather than its portrayal of the 'real world'. What is important to the women viewers is a subjective experience which relies on a 'structure of feeling' (1985:45).

Some research of this kind has tended to move away from ideological analyses of media texts towards emphasising their polysemic nature. This has largely been associated with the appeals of the theoretical position offered by postmodernism which suggests that contemporary aesthetics are characterised by a disruption of traditional certainties around narrative and generic form. Within this assumption, the text is open to multiple readings whereby audiences are offered more space to interpret the media's messages in their own way. Meaning therefore can become dependent upon the social and cultural make-up of viewers, rather than on the properties of the text itself. The location of meaning is a much contested issue within media studies. The suggestion that media forms are polysemic can radically alter consideration of the balance of power; from earlier feminist research which attacked the sexism and bias embedded within media

production to the proclamation of the creative power of the audience. Authors such as Fiske (1988) and Brown (1994) go as far as to suggest that women's use of popular culture is resistive, oppositional and even liberatory:

[...] the pleasure that women experience when talking about soap operas and constructing their own spoken text is often a resistive pleasure. (Brown, 1990:11)

The obvious problem here is that this argument could lead to a trajectory whereby feminist work loses its critical dimension, if the re-evaluation of female forms results in uncritical celebration. Modleski (1986) warns that there is a danger of the researcher falling in love with her research subjects and losing sight of the analysis of popular culture. However, not all authors have proclaimed women's media use as 'oppositional', rather some suggest it is 'combative' and *temporarily* resistive. McRobbie makes this clear:

Female participation in youth cultures can best be understood by moving away from the 'classic' subcultural terrain marked out as oppositional and creative by numerous sociologists. Girls negotiate different leisure spaces and different personal spaces from those inhabited by boys. These in turn offer them different possibilities for 'resistance', if indeed that is the right word to use. (1991:14)

It is notable that McRobbie (1982), Radway (1984) Hobson (1982) and Modleski (1991) all pay considerable attention to the features of the text in their analyses of media consumption. This maintains a critical focus on the construction of meaning through both text and audience, which in turn contributes to the subversion,

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<sup>12</sup> In 'The Culture of Working Class Girls' from Feminism and Youth Culture but originally part of MA thesis 'Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity', University of Birmingham, 1977.

maintenance or negotiation of hegemonic discourses of gender. It is with reference to their emphasis that I take my lead for this research, since I will pay close attention to the properties of the text as well as to the readings provided by the audience. In Chapter Six of this thesis I will return to the text/audience debates in developing a methodology for audience reception.

However, recent debates related to the theoretical developments within postmodernism have further challenged feminist research into the practices of women. These are most lucidly represented by Ang and Hermes (1996) who argue against research based primarily on women's experience and women's media consumption since it assumes gender as an a priori category which is ultimately essentialising and reductive. Rather, they propose that identities should be understood as not concrete or fixed but as always in process and never finished. They utilise de Lauretis' (1987) concept of 'technologies of gender' which to them suggests that gender is only *articulated* in media consumption amongst many other subject positions. This indeed poses a challenge to the established ground of investigating women audiences of women's genres and is reconsidered in Chapter Two of this thesis.

### **1.8 Transgressing the boundaries of communications research**

One of my proposals to address the text/audience dynamic as outlined in this chapter is to pay greater attention to 'speech'. Returning to Rakow's 'Reconsideration of the field' (1992), she laments the separation of studies into different categories of communication by suggesting that:

Scholars specialise in such areas as linguistics, public address, interpersonal communication, marital communication, organisational communication, health communication, public relations,



advertising, film studies, journalism, popular culture, technology and mass media. By organising inquiry as these categories do, from the starting point of contexts, content, means, or practices of communication, rather than from the starting point of humans in their particular historical and cultural locations, much of what is interesting and crucial to human existence and experience is made invisible; the context, content, means and practices of communication are usually taken as givens; the connections between them often do not get made. (1992:10).

I suggest that it is impossible to distinguish the study of the mediated communication from all other communicative contexts. If we accept that the media's most essential role is one of communication, then I suggest that we should try to conceptualise it in terms of its relationships, consistencies and inconsistencies with *other* forms of (interpersonal) communication.

Rakow therefore, calls for feminist scholars to cross the boundaries of communication studies. Kramarae's work for instance in *Technology and Women's Voice* (1988) discusses the way in which the organisation of household technologies affects women's interaction with other women in their confinement to the private sphere. Rakow discovered that "women's telephone talk fits into the appropriate spheres of activity and interests designated for women. It is both 'gendered work' and 'gender work', in that it is work that women do to hold together the fabric of the community" (1986:25).

In terms of feminist textual analyses of the media, Macdonald points out that language itself is often ignored, "Lacanian ideas, although predicated on language, were quickly applied to cinema's visual forms of address. Living as we do in a predominantly visual culture, the significance of words can often be overlooked" (1995:41). She goes on to discuss the relative invisibility of women's voices in the history of television and radio

as broadcasters took time in overcoming their allegiance to the more 'serious' voices of men in the arena of the public world of current affairs. Places where women's voices *have* found public space have been more likely on radio, most notably Radio 4's long-running *Women's Hour* which Macdonald suggests has a more intimate mode of address. Interestingly, to a barrage of protest, the programme was moved from its early afternoon to a mid-morning slot in 1991, exactly the time of day that television has demarcated for 'women's programming' and that I am concerned with here.

Macdonald (1995) also establishes the way in which various media texts have reinforced common 'folklinguistic' assumptions about the differences between male and female speech - such as the soap-opera's use of gossip, or the sitcom's use of 'bitching' and 'nagging' (e.g. *Birds of a Feather* BBC, UK, *Absolutely Fabulous*, BBC UK, *The Golden Girls* US). The textual analysis I propose in this research, offers a more sustained focus on the use of speech styles in the generic forms of morning television.

Some research within feminist audience studies has also pointed to speech communication as a central part of the construction of group cohesion around women's cultural practices. For instance Brown (1994) discusses the importance of women's gossip networks around soap opera viewing. She describes the way in which soap opera's emphasis upon forms of orality helps draw women together to produce a 'tertiary text' which is fundamental to their experienced subordinate position as women and thus offers a space, in gossip, where forms of struggle and resistance can be articulated:



Television viewing practices involving gossip among women, when conceptualised as part of women's oral culture, are not just individual or in-home experiences or only a part of women's discourse; they are also part of a pre-existing social organisation or social infrastructure of exchange offering an alternative construction of reality. (1994:38/39)

Brown's analysis, whilst it suggests that talk is important to the women's articulation of experience through the strength provided in the women's network, does not actually detail the particularities of how such talk emerges. However, when Dorothy Hobson in 'Soap Operas at Work' (1991) offered an account of women talking about soap opera in the workplace, she did note some of the operations involved in the group's discussion:

The closeness of the group of women has an effect not only on the free way in which they spoke about the television programmes which they viewed and these programmes' relation to their own lives, but also on the actual mode of discourse in which they operated. They interrupted each other, finished each other's sentences, and presented the same word in unison to respond to something which someone had said. An example was when Gill was talking about *Brookside*. "There are certain ones in there that get on your nerves..." "The Corkhills!" she was interrupted in unison by all the women. They were so aware of what they all thought that their responses were simultaneous. (1991:153)

What this demonstrates is that the actual formulation of the talk, the mode of discourse itself, cannot be separated from the content of their discussion about the soap operas. Talking about soaps fits into the working lives of these women. They discuss events in relation to the fictional text and in relation to real life experiences, but as Hobson suggests, "there is no confusion, only an interweaving" (1991:166). Brown (1994) also implies that the way in which women incorporate their discussion of soap operas into



their lifestyles is partly related to its textual form: - "Soap opera's connection to orality also gives it a unique connection to women's oral culture" (1994:59).

Hobson and Brown may point to the kind of study I am arguing for here - the analysis of language-use in relation to gendered media forms. There is a crucial dimension of their research however which requires discussion. In Hobson's study she suggested that such talk about television programmes "move[s] television into *a further dimension from that which ends with the viewing moment*. Indeed, talking about television programmes and what has happened in them is essential to making a programme popular and part of the cultural capital of general discourse" (1991:166 my italics). However, I want to suggest that such talk could be part of the cultural capital that also *begins* with the viewing moment and the context of consumption.

In both of these studies the soap opera text operates as a pre-text for social communication through which interesting material relations of women's lives emerge in their gossip networks. It seems to me that there is a stage removed in this process. How is it that these texts spoke to the women in the first place, in the moment when the text communicates with them in their own homes? For instance in Hobson's early work (1980) exactly how did the DJ's address help to combat loneliness? As feminists we are concerned with the gendered appeals of generic forms, but how is it that these gendered forms of address are received? What this requires is the realisation that mass communication is also at the same time *speech* communication which, whilst it may be transformed by the mediation of its discourse, is nevertheless, intended to be heard and communicated to someone.

To return to the text/audience debate, Kuhn (1987) has suggested that Brunsdon successfully considered the interplay of 'social reader and social text' in the early work in 'Notes on Soap Opera'. Kuhn acknowledges that the conceptualisation of the 'social subject' involves a theoretical shift into theories of discourse whereby discourses produced by a text can be better understood in terms of their interaction with other cultural discourses. As mentioned earlier, Brunsdon argues that women's 'cultural competences' developed through dominant discourses of feminine practices in women's lived realities circulate within the pleasures of the soap operas textual form. I suggest here that the cultural competence involved in the gendered pleasures of texts may also involve a 'communicative competence' which allows for a relationship between the discourse of a media text and the discursive environment into which it is received. Thus part of the appeal of a gendered text might be due to a mutual understanding of a socially inscribed genre of *speech*.

## Conclusion

In this chapter then, I have outlined some of the main trajectories of feminist scholarship in communication research. This has involved discussion of the categorisations within the discipline around mass communications research, media studies, film studies and speech communication. In this analysis of morning television I will retain a focus upon the gendering of genre and audience, which is the legacy of work in feminist television research, but I also propose to move the ground further. In recontextualising the importance of speech communication to forms of mass communication, I will consider the relationship of forms of talk to the gendering of cultural competences. In the next chapter therefore it is necessary to foreground the place of 'speech' within gender and cultural studies research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Speech and Gender - Cultural Studies and Feminist Linguistics**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter One I drew attention to the gap in feminist communication studies around considering the relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication. On this basis I intend to develop a methodology for investigating women's relationships with gendered media forms in terms of a communicative framework that rests on the use of language in action. This suggests an interdisciplinary approach to the research and in this chapter I will review strands from the literature in cultural studies and feminist linguistics which might be useful for this analysis. Firstly therefore, I will discuss the relevant language debates that have surfaced within cultural studies and explain the apparent disappearance of a theorisation of 'speech' from recent research, recovering some suggestions made by early cultural theorists. It is then necessary to address academic debates around gender and language found within feminist linguistics, and attempt to consolidate an approach that might benefit the study of gendered media consumption. There are surfacing debates which focus on the nature of everyday speech interaction that can help to develop an understanding of the ways in which we interact with the media in our everyday lives. In this chapter therefore I will delineate the space for theoretical development which language studies might offer researchers in feminist media studies.

#### **2.1 Language issues in cultural studies**

Cultural studies has certainly not ignored language issues altogether. In fact the publication of *Culture, Media, Language* (Hall et. al., 1980) brings together a number



of philosophical themes with which the Birmingham Centre had engaged in the 1970s. This had clearly considered the relationship between language and culture in some detail. In this section I want explain the form these investigations took and point to the ground which is useful for this study on gender, language and media.

In the essay 'Introduction to Language Studies at the Centre' (Weedon, Tolson and Mort, 1980a), it is clear that in the early, formative years of cultural studies there was a commitment to the need to generate an interest in language as fundamentally and inextricably bound up with the workings of culture:

It has often been argued that questions of language are central to cultural studies, that all cultural phenomena include some linguistic component and that processes of linguistic perception are involved in cultural analysis. Yet the study of language as such has frequently been marginalised, both in empirical research and in the Centre's theoretical concerns.  
(Weedon, Tolson and Mort, 1980a:177)

However, the trajectory of language studies at the Centre was to be very different.

Weedon et. al. suggest that it is the manner in which Williams and Hoggart defined culture as "a vital descriptive effort", a "way of seeing [...] things and [...] relationships" that has hindered the development of a "specific theoretical interest in language and signifying practices within cultural studies which would pay attention to the way meaning is constructed and *communicated*" (1980:178 my emphasis).

According to this version of the emergence of language studies, understanding language as a transparent expression of experience through structures of feeling meant that language studies were dominated by semiological approaches. Thus, much of the theoretical labour around language and culture followed the path laid down by

structuralists that conceived of language as an order of signs that are interpretable by the cultural analyst.

## 2.2 The influence of structuralism

The impact of structuralism on the study of language within cultural studies is pervasive. The early influence of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Generale*,<sup>1</sup> which describes a bifurcation of language into *langue* and *parole*, provides the catalyst for Barthes, Eco and Hall in the development of semiology. In Saussure's theory *la langue* refers to language as an abstract system which is made up of arbitrary signs that can be studied and described. *La parole* on the other hand represents language as it is spoken which is, according to Saussure, too difficult to investigate. Thus, within this distinction we are forced to accept *la langue* as the deep structure for all other manifestations of language, including speech. It is precisely here, in the enthusiasm of cultural theorists to engage with language as an arbitrary structure of signs, that we can observe the way in which language in interaction was side-stepped in early debates in cultural studies.

The Centre's willingness to embrace the concept of language as an arbitrary system of (interpretable) signs is understandable given their Marxist commitment to engaging with the media's influence on the masses. Influenced by Gramsci's writings on the role of the cultural sphere in the maintenance of capitalist societies<sup>2</sup>, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies conceptualised the media within Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* - the penetration of the state into all areas of civil society. Thus the concepts of power and ideology were central to cultural studies as it attempted to theorise how

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<sup>1</sup>Published first in 1916 by his students after his death.

the dominant classes maintain the status quo through the dissemination of their 'ruling ideas'. Following this Marxist tradition, Althusser's (1971) understanding of ideology and subjectivity helped to explain how these 'ruling ideas' reach the masses through 'Ideological State Apparatus' of which the media was seen as a powerful member.

Considering these political traditions it becomes possible to understand the appeal of a semiotic approach to the media as a method of demystifying the media's messages.

Early work therefore concentrated on the ideological meanings of the media's output.

The construction of meaning came to be understood in terms of signs and systems, largely due to the considerable influence of the work of Roland Barthes. His principle aim in *Mythologies* (1973) is to account for the 'naturalising effect' of ideology. In the essay 'Myth Today', Barthes develops Saussure's thesis. In Saussure, the division of the linguistic symbol into signifier and signified describes the arbitrary relationship of words and their meanings as a system of inter-related signs, a logic which Barthes takes further to apply to images. Here he suggests that in a culturally produced image there is also a second order of meaning and thus a second level of division between a sign and its meaning. There is the *denotative* content of an image - what is actually to be seen - and the *connotative* content of an image - which refers to a more abstract, interpretative level of what is to be understood within the cultural climate. Barthes stresses that this is a structural analysis that rests on reading the relationship of signs to one another<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Gramsci, A. (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> In 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (first published 1964, reprinted 1993) Barthes is keen to emphasise the importance of 'structure' to the semiotic understanding of the image as against what he refers to as a 'naïve' analysis:-

'Naïve' analysis is an enumeration of elements, structural description aims to grasp the relation of these elements by virtue of the principle of solidarity holding between the terms of a structure: if one term changes, so also do the others. (1993:19)



Through deciphering the structures by which messages are produced one is able to expose their ideological nature. This trend was followed by Hall in 'The Determination of News Photographs' (1972) and is still considered as one of the basic learning tools for students of media and cultural studies.

### **2.3 Language, gender and post-structuralism**

In the discussion above, structuralism offered no specific way of discussing gender, other than its significance as a binary symbolic referent. I want to turn here to the place where debates about gender and language have more specifically surfaced within cultural theory. These were directly related to the theoretical shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. Here, writers like Kristeva argued for a way out of the Saussurian impasse as she described the way in which modern structural linguistics has evolved: "As wardens of repression and rationalizers of the social contract in its most solid substratum (discourse), linguists carry the Stoic tradition to its conclusion" (1980:24). Kristeva therefore suggested a removal of the concept of 'langue' to re-establish the 'speaking subject' as an object for linguistics (Moi, 1985). This seems promising but the emphasis on the subject as symbolically structured is still problematic for the analysis of speech.

Feminists working within cultural studies investigating the relationship between language and subjectivity drew their direction from Althusser's theories of the constitution of the subject within ideological structures through concepts such as

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This is probably a reference to 'content' analysis which traditionally quantifies the presence or absence of certain categories in media output. Advocates of structural analysis contrast their method as offering a much more sophisticated theoretical understanding of media forms.

*misrecognition* and *interpellation*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the 1970s Language Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural studies set about developing the theoretical questions of subjectivity in terms of the internalisation or rejection of ideologies. Such conceptions of subjectivity owed much to Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of the constitution of the subject in language, influenced by Julia Kristeva.

The subjective internalisation of ideology was appealing to feminist researchers since Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a theory of the constitution of the gendered subject within language. Psychoanalytic theory is adopted to explain the structure of masculine and feminine discourses in language. Thus Kristeva's theory:

Involves a conception of a symbolic order governed by a set of dominant, masculine, patriarchal discourses to which some available discourses (for example those of art, literature and irrationality) are marginal. These 'feminine' discourses draw on areas which the patriarchal symbolic order represses. Women's position within language and culture is defined by their negative entry into the symbolic order, an entry which, Kristeva insists, occurs via the social structuring of the unconscious. (Weedon, Tolson and Mort, 1980b:207)

For Kristeva, subject positions are determined by identification - or not - with the mother. To be a feminine subject is not to be bound to the category 'woman' (as with Lacan), but it is to enter the symbolic with a stronger unconscious attachment to the mother figure. The unconscious drive repressed in the pre-Oedipal stages is referred to as the 'semiotic chora' which returns, "manifesting itself even in symbolic language through rhythm, intonation, gaps, meaningless and general disruption of the rational symbolic flow" (Cameron 1992:173-4). To Kristeva, the symbolic order is historically and socially posited, unlike Lacan and Freud who assume the structure of patriarchy to

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<sup>4</sup> In 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' (1971)



be universally and eternally given. In this way, Kristeva attempts to connect psychoanalytic theories of the constitution of identity with the material influences of wider social relations. However, this still leads mainly to textual analyses which demonstrates the problematic of women's discourses within the patriarchal symbolic of language. She argues that some kinds of discourse - mainly discourses of art, poetry and madness - are representative of the return of the repressed semiotic, rather than belonging to the patriarchal symbolic. As such, she envisaged these particular 'feminine discourses' as profoundly subversive.<sup>5</sup>

The constitution of subjectivity and identity as being structured through language is useful, but the psychoanalytically symbolic constitution of subjectivity, embedded in Kristeva's approach, makes it mainly applicable to the analysis of visual or textual forms - art and poetry for instance. The concept of the 'feminine subject' can be more easily studied in textual discourses than in the speech of 'real' women. Toril Moi (1985) outlines the incompatibility of Kristeva's writings with the research into language and gender from the 'Anglo-American tradition', which will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. There is a distinction here between feminist writings which focus on the identification of gendered 'subject positions' in the realm of the textual (reminiscent of the debate within film theory) and more sociologically centred research into women's lived experiences in their concrete situations.

## **2.4 The missing theorisation of speech**

In this thesis, the objections that I have to the approaches that structuralism and post-structuralism have taken to the theorisation of language within cultural studies as a

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<sup>5</sup>See for instance Kristeva (1984) Revolution in Poetic Language.



whole, are related to the absences that have been left in studying language in lived interaction. This is important, given the commitment of ethnographic cultural studies to documenting culture 'from below' in everyday experiences and everyday realities. I think some essence of the cultural significance of 'speech' can be resurrected from Hoggart and Williams's early writings. Hoggart suggests:

We have to try to see beyond the habits to what the habits stand for, to see through the statements to what the statements really mean (which may be the opposite of the statement themselves), to detect differing pressures of emotion behind idiomatic phrases and ritualistic observances.<sup>6</sup>

Interpreting 'what statements really mean' also calls for an understanding of 'idiomatic phrases and ritualistic observances' which, I would suggest, is not actually the same as investigating the structured level of the symbolic. Meaning, therefore can also be located in the 'uses' of language, not only in the expression of content. Thus in *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart discussed 'the oral tradition' of working class speech and the relevance of dialect, particular proverbs, sayings and aphorisms. He saw speech as important to an understanding of lived culture:

Speech will indicate a great deal, in particular the host of phrases in common use. Manners of speaking, the use of urban dialects and intonations, could probably indicate even more.  
(1959:21)

Here, Hoggart's references have little in common with a formal structuralist approach to linguistic analysis and, throughout *The Uses of Literacy*, the centrality of language to

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Weedon, Tolson and Mort (1980) from Hoggart *The Uses of Literacy* (1959)

the experience of say, working in a factory or waiting in a queue at the doctor's surgery, were anecdotally recorded. Crucially, Hoggart's references to language all pertain to lived speech and yet the structuralist approach to language, in its dismissal of 'parole', cannot provide a framework for spoken discourse. Thus everyday speech has been largely underdeveloped within cultural studies despite its emphasis on an ethnographic tradition.

If Williams and Hoggart's suggestions *do* point to a 'semiotic' analysis of language then I would suggest that it was not of the kind put forward by Barthes and others, but rather of the nature proposed by Volosinov (whose work enjoyed rather short-lived attention at the Centre in 1976). Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of the Language* (1973) developed a theory of language in opposition to Saussurean linguistics.

Volosinov was critical of two dominant trends he saw in the study of language at that time: individual subjectivism and abstract objectivism. The former referred to the understanding of language as entirely sourced by the individual psyche. In this tradition language as a system is a ready-made product that becomes active in the psychology of the creative individual. Abstract objectivism, on the other hand, does not recognise the creativity of the individual at all, but rather defines language as a unified system which can be theorised in terms of phonetic, grammatical and lexical rules. When the study of language is seen as an investigation of these rules it becomes an objective science, the substance of which is formulaic.

Indeed Volosinov's basic contention with Saussure's work was in the division of language into *langue* and *parole*, which in 'abstract objectivism' led to the rejection of the significance of the utterance (speech):



Language-speech according to Saussure, cannot be the object of study for linguistics. In and of itself, it lacks inner unity and validity as an autonomous entity; it is a heterogeneous composite. Its composite contradictory composition make it too difficult to handle. (1973:59)

For Volosinov however, speech was the essence of social life. He objected most to the fact that within these two theoretical positions, 'individual subjectivism' and 'abstract objectivism', neither contain the capacity to understand language as it is used by its speakers in society. Whilst 'individual subjectivism' draws attention to the uniqueness of the utterance, it can only be discussed in terms of the individual psyche, whilst 'abstract objectivism' leads us away completely from the living dynamism of language.<sup>7</sup> For, Volosinov, a focus on speech would best allow an explanation of the historical dynamism of language as a generative process. Interestingly, Raymond Williams also stressed the organic nature of language in very similar terms:

At the theoretical level, it underlines the fact that language is in continual social production in its most dynamic sense. In other words, not in the sense which is comparable with structuralism - that a central body of meaning is created and propagated, but in the sense that like any other social production it is in the arena of all sorts of shifts and interests and relations of dominance. Certain crises around certain experience will occur, which are registered in language in often surprising ways. The result of which is a notion of language as not merely the creation of arbitrary signs which are then reproduced within groups, which is the Structuralist model, but of signs which take on the changeable and often reversed social relations of a given society, so that what enters into them is the contradictory and often

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<sup>7</sup>Much of this argument is characterised by the dualist 'synchrony' versus 'diachrony' debate. Abstract objectivists understand language as synchronic, stable over time, whilst Volosinov and others who stress the social character of language understand it as diachronic in nature, that is dynamic and subject to historical and social change.



conflict-ridden social history of the people who speak the language, including all the variants between signs at any given time. (1979:176)

For Volosinov and Williams, language can be theorised as a site where the relations of social production such as dominance and social change can be explored. This project reaches beyond the capabilities of an abstract system of signs. Here, language is embedded in lived cultural experience, it depends on its speakers and the conditions of its environment and can therefore tell us about the processes at work in cultural life.

Volosinov thus theorises a *social* 'semiotics' which enables us to interpret the nature of spoken interaction that is not rooted in abstract rules. He suggests that spoken signs are conditioned above all by the social organisation of the participants involved and the immediate conditions of their interaction. In this way the sign is *multiaccentual* - subject to the social conditions within which it is produced. This seems rather closer to Hoggart's early references to the particular 'oral traditions' of the working class in specific social contexts. According to Volosinov speech must therefore be at the heart of a Marxist philosophy of the language:

The process of understanding any ideological phenomena at all (be it a picture, a piece of music a ritual, or an act of human contact) cannot operate without the participation of inner speech. All manifestations of ideological creativity - all other non-verbal signs - are bathed by, suspended in, and cannot be entirely segregated or divorced from the element of speech. (1973:15)

To study the workings of ideology and its relationship to the lived subjectivities of the people, one must therefore study the social contexts of speech.

## 2.5 Speech genres

For this thesis, Volosinov's most interesting assertion is his insistence on studying language in connection with its 'concrete conditions'. He stresses the importance of generic conditions of speech styles in their own environment, suggesting that different cultural spheres apply their own 'speech genres' that correspond to their own specific conditions. This suggests that speech styles can be practically studied in context. In fact as Weedon, Tolson and Mort (1980a) inform us, cultural studies' interest in language and its signifying practices "has run alongside, and is *separate* from, ethnographically based work on the cultural tradition, popular culture and subcultures" (1980a:178, my italics). Here, I intend to suggest how, theoretically, language might be reinserted into the study of lived culture in the way in which Hoggart implies.

One of the most fundamental insights for such a study rests upon the concept of the 'speech genre'. Volosinov suggests that real life utterances are subject to behavioural genres. The structures of these genres depend upon the specific features of the behavioural situation. These behavioural genres are located in the richness and diversity of cultural life and found within the various organisational structures in society:

Village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers' lunch time chats, etc., will all have their own types. Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular repertoire of little behavioural genres. The behavioural genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal, and social composition. The behavioural genre is a fact of the social milieu: of holiday, leisure time, and of social contact in the parlour, the workshop, etc..

(1973:97)

Following Volosinov, it was M.M.Bakhtin (1986) who set out to provide a more precise definition of the characteristics of speech genres.<sup>8</sup> In his essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres', Bakhtin provides us with an explanation of the importance of the utterance to the understanding of changes taking place in social life: "Utterances and their types, that is speech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language" (1986:65). It is the utterance that gives language its life, yet at the time he was writing he claimed that the speech genre had not been given adequate attention in comparison to literary genres.

In Bakhtin's essay, recognising speech genres means understanding language in terms of *communication*, rather than in terms of traditional linguistic approaches to language structures. For instance, he juxtaposes the problem of the *sentence* as a unit of language as distinct from the *utterance* as a unit of speech communication. The sentence is a grammatical construct which is complete whereas the utterance is dependant upon the response of the *addressee* in any dialogue. Therefore according to Bakhtin, "it can determine others' responsive positions under the complex conditions of speech communication in a particular cultural sphere" (1986:76).

Each cultural sphere develops its own relatively stable types of utterance which it is possible to study in terms of genre. These speech genres can be described in terms of their compositional structure, through the conditions and goals of that specific environment. For instance, the way in which we recognise the end of utterances is dependant upon the context, the speaker and the style of discourse. We learn to master these different genres that "have definitive and relatively stable typical forms of

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<sup>8</sup> Volosinov was part of the 'Bakhtin Group' of Russian linguists working in the 1930s. The name is



construction of the whole"(1986:79). Thus, when hearing others speak, we identify the genre of the utterance, we predict a certain length and we foresee the end. These particular stylistic features which are conditioned by who is being spoken *to*, as well as who is speaking, enable the distinction of speech genres.

These suggestions by Bakhtin/Volosinov point to the empirical study of language in action but, as mentioned earlier, this has rarely been done within cultural studies. Some discussion of Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was included in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 9 (Spring 1976), introduced by Charles Woolfson in 'The Semiotics of Working Class Speech'. Taking his direction from Volosinov, he suggested that a genuinely Marxist approach to semiotics would take the verbal sign as the key to social consciousness. What is important about Woolfson's essay is that he does actually address some of the methodological issues of conducting research into speech genres and provides us with transcripts of recordings of primary conversational data. As Tolson suggested in the same issue, Woolfson could have provided a new direction since he "demarcates and begins to analyse, a territory of informal everyday communication, which he calls 'behavioural ideology'"(1976:199).

Woolfson's data consists of transcripts of 'naturally occurring' conversations between transport workers and vehicle construction workers at a time of union action. His analysis of these transcripts is based around certain recurring themes, such as 'solidarity', to assess the presence of both resistive and dominant hegemonic discourses in the workers' speech. He demonstrates that such naturally occurring discourse is constantly changing through conflicting ideological currents which, at the same time,

are both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. He describes social interaction therefore as the battleground where ideological tensions are constantly being fought out. This concurs with Volosinov's assertions that ideological signs are never fixed but are *multiaccentuated*, dynamic in lived experience. It is here in actual speech forms that the complexity of social consciousness can be convincingly explored.

However, Woolfson's article, whilst it provided a beginning, is by no means an exemplary discussion of speech interaction in lived culture. As Tolson (1976) points out, it lacks an analysis of the coded and rule-bound nature of social interaction. This is not a call for a reinvestment in a structuralist approach to language, rather it suggests Woolfson's failure to consider the discourse in terms of its *genre*, as described above. Both Volosinov and Bakhtin stress that there is a systematicity involved in the cultural organisation of everyday interaction which determines its genre:

Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organisation of audience and hence a particular repertoire of little behavioural genres. The behavioural genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned into it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal and social composition.  
(Volosinov, 1973:96-97)

Thus far, I have explained the theoretical trajectory which has for the most part marginalised the study of speech in mainstream cultural studies. Recovering the interest in speech in the work of early British cultural theorists, we find a link to the more rigorous approach to the generic specificity of contextualised speech offered by Volosinov and Bakhtin. In this thesis however, I am interested in the context of speech which is broadcast. Bakhtin's assertion that utterances can "determine others' responsive



positions" is here extremely pertinent for the study of audience reception. Does the speech produced for the audience at home position viewers' responses in a certain way and if so, can we detail this speech as genre-specific? I suggest that there is a communicative strategy to be explained in broadcasting moments where the speech can only be understood in terms of its addressee, which in the case of broadcasting becomes the audience at home.

In the progress through the literature so far, I have made a case for making 'speech' central to an understanding of cultural contexts, which here refers to broadcasting, but I have not yet addressed the main issue I outlined in Chapter One, which was for the reconsideration of speech communication together with mass communication in a feminist analyses of gender.

## **2.6 Women's speech as 'gossip'**

As discussed in Chapter One, ethnographically based work in the field of media and cultural studies led to a move to understanding the readers of cultural texts, which meant speaking to romance readers, magazine readers or soap opera viewers about the pleasures involved in their popular tastes. In fact feminist researchers often documented the willingness of women to be called upon as subjects of research and to speak of their lives, and areas of their lives, which had previously been regarded as trivial or even ignored. Hobson (1982) described the many hours she was encouraged to stay talking with some of her interviewees in their homes. Ann Gray (1992) also documented how some of the women in her study were eager to tell her about parts of their lives which were not necessarily suggested by herself as the researcher.



However, Angela McRobbie's (1982/91) article, 'The Politics of Feminist Research: Between Talk, Text and Action', outlined some more radical suggestions for research into women's groups. Her concern is that in much research into women's groups what is said in interviews is taken as 'definitive' in the name of 'letting women speak out'.

Whilst the relating of experiences is assumed to be a way of 'articulating' subjectivities rather than a transparent source of 'reality' (Weedon, 1987), the particular complex forms that these 'articulations' take are not critically detailed. McRobbie goes on to ask, "could it be that women are often such good research subjects *because* of their willingness to talk which is in itself an index of their powerlessness?" (1991:78, my italics).<sup>9</sup>

This resonates with comments made by other feminists about women's speech. For instance, Spender (1980) and Daly (1978) draw attention to the fact that the amount of talk women do has often been a contentious issue. Women are often derided as 'empty vessels' who talk too much and, at the same time, are encouraged to be silent. Thus, we need to focus our attention on the centrality of talk and speech to feminist debates rather than take the content of women's speech for granted. McRobbie goes on to tease out the double bind of both the historic need for women to find a voice but also of the traditional denigration of women's speech:

This is a political struggle in itself. It amounts to an attempt to break out of the confines of talk, which is a comfortable but ultimately restricting ghetto. It is a form called 'gossip' where women have been located through history. However, it is particularly contradictory route outwards from the privatised local sphere of feminism to full-scale engagement in the public sphere. (1991:67-8)

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<sup>9</sup> I return to this debate in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Therefore, feminists have suggested that the nature of talk between women calls for serious critical attention, since the apparent eagerness of women to talk is a complicated political issue.

As McRobbie indicates, talk between women is often dismissed as 'gossip'. When Kramer investigated popular perceptions of the characteristics of women's language she found that the most frequent responses were that women talk about 'trivial topics' and that they indulge in "gossip and gibberish" (1977:157). Whilst "women chatter, tattle, gab, rabbit, prattle, nag, whine, bitch, men devote themselves to more consequential tasks; they build ships, discover continents, fight wars. They do not hang about nattering." (Emler 1994:118). The popular conception therefore is that when men talk, they debate, philosophise, exchange ideas, conduct business and engage in politics.

The traditional division of the two separate spheres of the public and private, as Emler suggests above, also divides what is important and inconsequential subject matter for discussion. Family matters and personal relationships are relegated to the 'irrelevant' private world of women. The devaluation of women's talk as 'gossip' assists in containing women's voices within the private sphere, since their conversations are not deemed 'serious' enough for 'rational' debate within the public sphere. This draws interesting parallels for this study with popular critiques of daytime television and talk shows that I discuss in Chapter Three of this research.

This discussion of the relationship between the sexes, involving different discursive strategies and the public sphere, has also been conceived of in terms of women's

'relational', versus men's 'rational', ethical judgements. In her study of women's and men's responses to moral dilemmas Gilligan (1982) suggests that their moral judgements significantly differ:

[...] the conventions that shape women's moral judgements differ from those that apply to men  
[...] Women's construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules ties the development of their moral thinking to changes in their understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality and justice is tied development to the logic of equality and reciprocity. Thus the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationship, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach. (1982:73)

Women therefore negotiate their connectness to one another through a 'different voice' which is based upon the ethic of care whereby responsibility is inextricably tied to relationships. Thus, women generate contextualised relational senses of self as opposed to the masculine (neo-Kantian) tradition that separates the personal from the moral (Livingstone, 1994).

Through this emphasis on women's relational connectedness, feminists have re-evaluated gossip as a moral virtue. Some argue that gossiping throughout history has been despised precisely because of the potential it offers women for group solidarity. Oakley (1972) points out that between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries gossips endured public shaming, the ducking stool, the stocks, or were even made to wear an iron mask with a spike or wheel which projected into the mouth to stop their tongues. Gluckman (1963) Oakley (1972) Emler (1994), and all go so far as to suggest that many of the half million women burned as witches throughout Europe were probably killed



for gossiping. According to Spender, this fear of gossip is legitimate since, "when women come together they have the opportunity to 'compare' notes, collectively to 'see' the limitations of patriarchal reality, and what they say - and do - can be subversive of that reality" (1980:108). Thus, gossip can be re-evaluated in terms of what it can offer women collectively which poses a threat to the patriarchal status quo.

Therefore, echoing Gilligan's research, Spacks (1985) suggests that gossip promotes close and emotionally fruitful human associations, reflects intense interest in the personal and, rather than being judged as random and careless, requires the skills of subtle judgement and discrimination. Similarly Levin and Arluke (1987) state that gossip serves useful psychological functions such as: enhancing the self-esteem or status of a group; providing information which helps to evaluate ourselves through comparison with others; maintaining social cohesiveness within a group and helping to define ambiguous and stressful situations.

These benefits to group dynamics may also have a political function since there is a suggestion that gossip is characteristic among oppressed groups. In this connection, Spacks (1985) claims that gossip has always been an outlet for the disadvantaged, for instance; servants talking of their masters, students of their teachers and mistresses telling secrets of their lovers. Gossip is therefore often defended by feminists for assisting in generating a sense of social cohesion and sisterhood between women. Joan Cassell (1977) for example, describes gossip as having a significant role in the feminist consciousness-raising movements of the 1970s that campaigned for serious political change.

However, these rather triumphalist feminist declarations of the positive and productive nature of gossip for women within the structures of patriarchy have offered no real analysis of gossip beyond its content of the private and personal. Collins (1994) argued that gossip provides an oppositional mode of discourse to exclusive masculinist, scientific paradigms. She suggests that it is gossip's ability to resist strict rules and deny any special authority roles which make it an appealing discourse style for women and calls for the reclaiming of gossip under a feminist anthropology:

Let "gossip" refer to talk about the particular, "personal", and concrete by well disposed acquaintances, whereby we act as midwives to each other's moral development. Let it carry its association with the feminine and a positive evaluation. (1994:114)

Collins admits, at the beginning of her 'feminist defence' of gossip that "much of what follows is suggestive rather than tightly argued; much verges on armchair sociology like gossip itself" (1994:106). However, it is possible to understand how women's speech styles work as discursive constructions in action, in terms of their features and formulations in real situations, rather than in theoretical abstractions. This has been more formally documented in feminist sociolinguistic research - the 'Anglo-American tradition' that I referred to earlier.

## **2.7 Gender in interaction**

More formal analyses of speech patterns can be found within the now well-established field of feminist sociolinguistics. It is necessary here to sketch out this history as it raises interesting questions about research into women's culture.

Initially, feminists interested in the relationship between language and women's subordination were dominated by concerns about the misogyny embedded within the (English) language itself. Research focussed on problematic generic pronouns (e.g. Nilsen et. al., 1977 and Martyna, 1980), sexist naming of titles such as 'chairman', 'postman' etc. and thorough examination of the lexicon also revealed the inequity and intensity of the overwhelming number of (usually sexual) derogatory words for women (Schultz, 1975, Stanley, 1977 and Bolinger, 1980). Etymologists describe this environment as "the semantic derogation of women" (Schultz, 1975) whereby language often functions to label and denigrate women. This has led to campaigns for language reform with projects such as feminist dictionaries and codes of practice on language use (Graham, 1975, Kramarae and Treichler, 1985 and Miller and Swift, 1980). In Spender's influential *Man Made Language* (1985) she argues that the construction of language in turn constructs a sexist reality: "[I]t has been the dominant group - in this case, males - who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language map which is in their interest" (1985:142).

This 'dominance' approach has also impacted upon the study of interaction where empirical research about who gets to speak, where, in what situations, to whom, who is silenced and how, produced the generalised finding that women suffer largely in battles of communication at the hands, or rather words, of men. One of the earliest and most influential discussions of women's speech was Lakoff's (1975) largely intuitive suggestions that women's speech helps explain their powerlessness; for instance the use of tag questions and minimal responses are interpreted as markers of hesitancy. Other research such as Fishman's (1980) study of the work women do in interaction suggests that women largely provide the interactional labour in conversation with men - offering



up topics which are either taken up or ignored by men, supporting men's speech and encouraging their talk. She refers to this as 'interactional shitwork'. Zimmerman and West (1975) describe the way in which men dominate women in conversation by interrupting them much more often in mixed interaction, suggesting that men often violate the speaking rights of women.

These and other contributions to the 'dominance' approach in linguistics have led to a broad feminist concern that research focussing on the interactional order characterises women's speech as deficient. As such women are called upon to address their deficiency as 'problem' speakers in the growing lucrative business of self assertiveness training (see Cameron,1995a and Crawford,1995 for accounts). West (1995) is concerned that assessments based on women's 'deficiencies' suggest a fixed 'standard' of conversational competence against which women's conversational practices are evaluated. In this equation, the characteristics associated with masculine discourse are always more highly regarded than those of feminine discourse. Responding to this concern, there has been an effort to re-evaluate women as skilful speakers who draw upon different kinds of competences in conversation. For instance, Coates (1989) in 'Gossip Revisited' addresses features that have previously been thought of as weaknesses, such as the use of tag questions and hedges, and, instead describes these attributes as aspects of positive competences, such as active listenership. In her research on transcripts of all-female speech, women are adopting more co-operative, rapport-oriented communication strategies through 'latching' each others turns, sharing the 'floor' (Edelsky,1981) and indicating active listnership through the use of minimal responses (Coates,1989).

This kind of research, arguably influenced by a liberal feminist politics (Gibbon,1999), has perpetuated what has been referred to as the 'dual cultures' approach which concentrates upon the *differences* between women's and men's speech. The assumption behind this approach is that different styles are equal but emerge from culturally specific gendered norms. These differences are generally polarised as 'report talk' (masculine) versus 'rapport talk' (feminine) (Tannen 1990). Utilising theories from Gumperz (1982) on the problems of cross-cultural communication between different ethnic communities which can lead to 'miscommunication', Maltz and Borker (1982) suggest that the breakdown of communication between the sexes can be explained in the same way. This approach has been adopted in best selling books that have emerged as popular within the contemporary climate of cultural anxiety about the divorce rate. The best known of these are, John Gray's (1993) *Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus* and Deborah Tannen's (1990) *You Just Don't Understand*. This research has often been cited in women's self-help literature (Crawford 1995).

Tannen, as a linguist, in particular has been the target of fierce criticism from her colleagues working in feminist linguistics for adopting a 'two cultures' approach which validates both strategies without accounting for the power differences between speakers. Troemel-Ploetz (1991) accuses Tannen of being an apologist for men excusing their insensitivity as a simple a question of style. She says of *You Just Don't Understand*:

This book trivialises our experience of injustice and of conversational dominance; it disguises power differences; it conceals who has to adjust; it veils difference again and again and equalizes with a levelling mania any experience in how we experience women and men (1991:501).



Criticism about relativity in this approach is further compounded by its commercial appeal to middle-class heterosexual coupledness. Cameron (1992b) discusses the way in which marketing reviews lauded *You Just Don't Understand* as the book which could 'save your marriage' thus further marginalising any sense of a feminist politics.

What emerged in the field was a gradual ascendancy of 'difference' over 'dominance' approaches to gender and language (Cameron, 1995b). This can be observed by the number of studies of gender differences in different domains of social life. Holmes (1998) points out that it has largely been accepted that women and men use language differently (e.g. Thorne, Kramarae and Henley, 1983 and Coates, 1993) which she describes through the establishment of a series of universals:

Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do  
[*affective*, interpersonal meaning; *referential* informative meaning...]

Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more than men do [...]

Women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity while (especially in formal contexts) men tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase their power and status[...]

Women use more standard forms than men from the same social group in the same context[...]

Women are stylistically more flexible than men. (1997:462-475)

Holmes argues that while some of these 'universals' have been identified across cultures, more research is necessary for fear of promoting stereotypes and myths which over-simplify the complexities in the data. The value of distinguishing 'universals' of this kind in on-going research has been hotly contested. Gibbons (1999) argues that in much sex difference research the overlaps between women and men and differences



among women or among men are minimised or denied, while female-male differences are exaggerated into polarised positions.

Bing and Bergvall (1997) call for research to reach beyond binary thinking in the same way that we have realised that other binary categories, like black and white, are no longer defensible. They argue that in continually asking questions of difference researchers are merely perpetuating essentialising stereotypes of gender dichotomies. However, it is not the case that in problematising 'difference' as apolitical that more contemporary language theorists would argue for a return to the 'dominance' approach, as Cameron points out:

Both dominance and difference represented particular moments in feminism: dominance was the moment of feminist outrage, of bearing witness to oppression in all aspects of women's lives, while difference was the moment of feminist celebration, reclaiming and revaluing women's distinctive cultural traditions. (1995b:39)

The third turn, so to speak, is to a more 'postmodern' position where gender identity is rethought as not a 'fixed' entity in which we 'become' completely, however socially constructed, but a series of expressions that are 'performed'. This is reminiscent of the debate within media studies outlined by Ang and Hermes (1996), briefly summarised in Chapter One, where the authors rely on De Lauretis' (1987) theorisation of gender as variously 'articulated', shifting through incarnations of multiple identities.

**2.8 Feminist media studies/feminist linguistics - finding ground for research**

As we have seen, and might expect, both feminist media studies and feminist linguistics have moved through three basically similar theoretical shifts in the development of both fields.

	Feminist Media Studies	Feminist Linguistics
Stage One	<p><i>The Dominance approach -</i></p> <p>Understands the mass media as a powerful patriarchal tool which served to ideologically reinforce myths about masculinity and femininity.</p>	<p><i>The Dominance approach -</i></p> <p>Understands language structure and language use as powerful tools in the definition, denigration and silencing of women.</p>
Stage Two	<p><i>The Difference approach -</i></p> <p>Re-evaluates women's cultural practices and genres and celebrates women's cultural competences resisting their characterisation as cultural dopes</p>	<p><i>The Difference approach -</i></p> <p>Re-evaluates women's linguistic strategies and celebrates their communicative competences resisting their characterisation as deficient speakers.</p>
Stage Three	<p><i>The Postmodern approach -</i></p> <p>(Ang and Hermes, 1996)</p> <p>Accepts that genres are hybrid and that identity is not fixed and stable. Results in shifting away from researching 'gendered' audiences as categories and understands identities as multiple and fragmentary.</p>	<p><i>The Postmodern approach -</i></p> <p>(Cameron, 1995b 1998a,b)</p> <p>Accepts that the polarisation of accounts of speaking strategies can represent oversimplification. Results in shifting away from rigid binary distinctions to a 'performative' model of language use in which language practices represent multiple and overlapping identities.</p>

The two traditions have evolved, as one might expect, in a parallel 'feminist' trajectory, although I would not wish to suggest that at each shift there are not variations and stages in between. However, I would like to discuss some of the nuances in the two 'postmodern' approaches as characterised here by Ang and Hermes (1996) and Cameron (1995b and 1998a,b).

Ang and Hermes call for a resistance to research into gendered categories, "we will argue here that limiting ourselves to women audiences as an empirical starting point for analysis would risk reproducing static and essentialist concepts of gender identity" (1991:326). They suggest that in a media-saturated world we can no longer see the audience as demarcated groups of people, rather we need a much more convoluted map of 'consumption' analysis. This has been taken to suggest that we should be researching via more particularised ethnographies (Brunsdon, 1997) which take into account various media consumption practices at the same time as various shifting subject positions.

Cameron (1995b) on the other hand seems to be suggesting that gender requires a more sustained focus and a further theorising that even returns us to one of the fundamental proclamations in feminist theory:

The most important insight we need to take account of is that *gender is a problem, not a solution* [...] Feminists must take it as axiomatic that this is indeed a question worth asking. As Simone De Beauvoir once said, 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. The question is how? (1995b:42)



What Cameron poses then is a consideration of gender as not a finished product but as a negotiation of discourses and practices that we work upon throughout our daily experience. This calls upon Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' whereby, "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990:25). Rather than assuming that biological difference produces different speakers or different consumers of cultural products, we can understand those practices as the 'performance' of gendered subjectivities:

From this point of view, it would be desirable to reformulate notions such as 'women's language' or 'men's style'. Instead of saying simply that these styles are produced by women and men as markers of their gender affiliation, we could say that the styles themselves are produced as masculine and feminine, and that individuals making varying accommodations to those styles in the process of producing *themselves* as gendered subjects. In other words if I talk like a woman this is not just the inevitable outcome of the fact that I am a woman; it is one way I have of becoming a woman, producing myself *as* one. (Cameron 1995b:43)

This seems to be a less radical shift than Ang and Hermes (1996) absorption of gendered identities within other shifting dynamics in which gendered realities might at moments disappear.

When Cameron (1998a) adopts this approach to the data of all-male speech of college students, she finds that they use strategies which are both competitive, in keeping with what one expects, but also co-operative and relational, in jointly 'latching' each other's turns to producing a kind of 'gossip'. However, this male speech can still be interpreted as a gendered encounter. What is interesting is that when the men *do* adopt what is

relatively new approach together for the first time, does it not make sense to research how a broadcast genre constructs its target audience of women in the first instance?

If our gendered identities are indeed performed, drawing upon many circulating and hegemonic discourses, then surely some of those discourses and repertoires are drawn from the media. In Cameron's (1998a) study the college men were also watching a basketball match and their discussion was punctuated by comments about the game, producing 'sports talk' which conforms to conventional gendered conceptions of speech style. Isn't this part of the communicative event too? Does the sports commentary - perhaps in its recounting of the facts related to players performances, disparagement of players not playing well, competitive banter between (usually male) commentators - have some influence upon the speech 'performances' of masculinity that then get (re)produced in the room? (Interestingly they talk about a gay classmate wearing shorts that are too short.) These relationships seem very plausible and yet rarely has this kind of research been done within either of these paradigms.

Discourses of masculinity and femininity are reproduced and communicated through the mass media in all kinds of spaces on the schedule, despite the fragmentation of audiences. If one is to understand the generic specificity of speech in a clearly gendered genre then surely one should investigate how mediated 'performances' of gender impact upon lived 'performances' of gender in the moments of viewing.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, therefore, I have attempted to explain cultural studies' lack of attention to speech over the years and resurrect some of the early discussions of the importance



culturally thought of as a 'feminine' style of speech, they are also confirming their heterosexual masculinity through making negative comments about gay classmates. "In another context [...] the same objective might well be pursued through explicitly antagonistic strategies, such as yelling abuse at women or gays in the street [...] *Both* strategies could be said to do performative gender work." (1998a:282)

This is actually reminiscent of the extract which Ang and Hermes describe from Bausinger at the beginning of *their* article. They recount Bausinger's discussion of Mrs Meier who ends up watching a sports football programme, but they also recount the fact that she watches the game to spend more time with her son - reproducing her role as a mother. They speculate that she may well then go on to watch football in future, thus not conforming to the general assumption that 'football is for men'. This may be true, but the practice here still reproduces gendered relations - no one has ever denied that they are not complex. Like Cameron's interpretation, this is still a gendered reading, just a less stable fixing of positions.

Where does this leave my research into a group of women? Firstly, I disagree with Ang and Hermes (1996) that the gendering of genre is no longer an issue. In Britain multi-channel reception is by no means universal - certain sections of the terrestrial schedule do indeed imply a gendered audience - here the morning slot from 9am -12noon. I would also argue that the presentation of football events for example is still a stable masculine generic form, wherever it appears on a multi-channel schedule. I argued in Chapter One for a consideration of genre as gendered through its mode of address - taking more seriously the way in which 'Talk TV' actually talks. Since I am bringing a



of speech genres. Where gendered accounts of language have arisen they have referred to a patriarchal symbolic order which is embedded within unconscious subjectivities. Sociolinguistics, on the other hand provides a huge research field where accounts of gendered speech patterns abound. This feminist research however, has taken a series of turns that echoes wider feminist developments in research into the cultural sphere.

I have identified a space within these theoretical shifts whereby one can understand gender as a 'performed' and not as a given entity (Butler 1990) in both speech style and cultural consumption. What I propose in this thesis is that gendered speech might be produced with specific media genres, which may in turn influence speech production in the home. Understanding the role the media plays in gendered speech production requires the fusing of the mass/speech communication dichotomy that I outlined in Chapter One.

## Chapter Three

### Daytime Talk

#### Introduction

In the opening two chapters, I have suggested converging approaches to research in mass (broadcast) communication with research into speech communication, in order to help explain the communicative impact of talk television with the audience at home.

The growth of a particular kind of programming which emerged in the late 1980s and thrived in the 1990s, privileges the voices of ordinary people, mostly women. Talk based television, I suggest requires analysis not just as television but also as talk.

In this thesis I am particularly interested in the 9am - 12noon morning slot which, during the period of my research (1996-1998), consisted mainly of talk shows and morning magazine programmes that structure their formats around a mixture of chat, discussion and debate. The programmes I focus on for my study are *This Morning* (ITV), *Good Morning* (BBC1), *The Time...The Place* (ITV), *Kilroy* (BBC1), and *Vanessa* (ITV). I will further explain my rationale for such a grouping later in this chapter, since these programmes do not all conform to the same format.

This chapter will provide some background to the development of daytime 'talk'- based programming in the UK and outline some of the ways in which the phenomenon has been theorised within media and cultural studies, though much of this research refers to American shows. Engaging with popular debate about the tabloidisation of culture and its association with feminine cultural forms, the chapter takes into account feminist debates about the public sphere and discusses the various positive and negative

evaluations that the talk show has invited. I then suggest moving beyond such value judgements and re-state my argument that talk television requires a more thorough analysis of the talk itself.

### **3.1 History of British daytime television**

Despite general acknowledgement that US and UK broadcasting systems have developed from different rationales, to some extent British daytime programming has tended to reflect - if with some considerable time lapse - developments in America.<sup>1</sup> US network television initially discovered the commercial benefits of daytime television as delivering relatively large audiences with low production costs. NBC's pioneering of the *Today* program, a mixture of news and chat, led to CBS following in 1954 with *The Morning Show*, another news chat based program hosted by journalist Charles Colingwood, and *Home* a domestically oriented show hosted by duo Arlene Francis and Hugh Downes.

These shows focussed on discussing domestic issues; women's health, relationship advice, issues around the family etc. - areas that are not usually warranted worthy of discussion in 'serious' discussion programmes which foreground public policy issues such as the economy, foreign affairs and party policy. Thus, the daytime chat show's recourse to the private sphere maintained an address to women audiences, as according to Matelski:

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<sup>1</sup> The UK has a tradition, generally attributed to Lord Reith, of 'public service', attempting to provide the audience with what they needed - education, information and cultural taste. The US on the other hand developed its broadcasting policy in the belief in a free market economy more concerned with technological advancement, opening up the airwaves and allowing the consumer to decide the success and failure of programming content. (Matelski, 1991)



one of the most profitable daytime programming categories for adult women throughout television history has been the talks show/news magazine [...] all maintain the objective of informing the audience, while giving them a healthy dose of entertainment. (1991:13)

In the UK, at least until the mid 1980s, the public service ethos preserved from the days of Lord Reith had maintained scheduling in the daytime for children's (mostly educational) programming, news and eventually Open University programmes - with long periods of the test card. It was not until 1983 that the initial notion of breakfast television during the day broke the mould to experiment with daytime entertainment. Here, according to media commentators Dugdale and Saynor, daytime television programming in Britain took its lead directly from the United States:

British executives experienced only in prime time programming, had no idea how to serve a mysterious, largely female audience that did not work 9-to-5. So they followed standard procedure: head for Heathrow. (*The Guardian* 7/12/92)

The British programmes I am concerned with here almost all began in the late 1980s/early 1990s, some considerable time after their US counterparts<sup>2</sup>. Estimates suggest that a daytime audience comprises of 66% women, 25% men and 8% children<sup>3</sup> and therefore content reflects such an audience share. The mix of daytime television encompasses cookery programmes, soap operas, quiz shows, music and chat, programming which has traditionally been felt to appeal to female audiences, supposedly attracting women at home whilst husbands are out to work. (Within this

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<sup>2</sup> Duration of programmes' running periods:

*This Morning* - 1988 - 2001

*Good Morning* - 1992 -1996

*The Time, The Place* - 1990 -1998

*Kilroy* - 1993 - present

*Vanessa* - 1996 - 1998.

rationale the six o'clock home-coming of the husband/father is marked by the schedulers with 'serious' news.) This points to the most contentious issue in popular discussions about daytime television - it is often described as trashy, tabloid television which is aimed at women, as compared with the more 'serious', 'hard' world of documentary and news which belongs to a masculine world. Discussion of this genre is thus located within the public/private debate that is entrenched within feminist theory.

Afternoon programming had begun to introduce such a mix of entertainment, but in the late 1980s in the UK at least, the period of the day in between early morning breakfast programmes and the afternoon, was still rather barren. As one commentator describes:

For years, mornings on ITV had been monstrously dull, an unappetising mix of adult education programmes, which the ITC network was committed to running under the terms of the old Broadcasting Act. It was a worthy commitment but a doomed one. No one was actually watching ITV in the mornings, save for a handful of people who enjoyed crackly old black and white history films. (Malone 1996:21)

In October 1988 ITV's Daytime Committee came up with the idea of a live ninety-minute morning entertainment magazine programme and *This Morning* presented by Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan was born. The show's success produced the BBC's rival copycat show *Good Morning* presented by Nick Owen and Ann Diamond, which was launched in October 1992. Dugdale and Saynor in *The Guardian* suggest that these developments in daytime broadcasting were direct reflections of commercial successes across the Atlantic:



The two breakfast shows launched in 1983 accordingly were based on US models, with the name of TV-am's *Good Morning Britain* signalling its debt to the ABC's *Good Morning America*. Later came the rival shout-in's *Kilroy* and *The Time... The Place*, both feeble copies of *Donahue*. Then ITV's *This Morning* (now abjectly mimicked by the BBC), in which husband and wife hosts Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan are a reasonably convincing simulacrum of the classic American winsome twosome. All that's lacking is a facsimile of the Oprah Winfrey Show.

The daytime mix of talk/news/magazines programming therefore was a direct descendant of American versions which have been trivialised by British commentators for their very commercial emphasis - cheap to produce and yet filling large gaps in programme scheduling.<sup>4</sup> It is my intention in this thesis to focus on the grouping together of talk-based programming morning television in the UK.

### 3.2 'Daytime' as a talk based genre

Daytime television is sometimes discussed as though it is a definitive genre, and yet it is made up of distinctive programming formats. For instance, when Tania Modleski (1983) talks about daytime television and women's work, she is referring to the way in which soap operas, quiz shows and commercials interrelate within the daily lives of women. More contemporary debates about daytime television often centre themselves around audience participatory talk shows which have flourished, especially in the US, since the eighties (Shattuc 1997). Polly Toynbee (1996) a journalist and media critic, when describing this programming in the *Radio Times* as 'tepid dishwater soup' focuses on daytime television as magazine chat programmes in the mould of *This Morning with*

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<sup>3</sup>*The Scotsman* 24/7/96

<sup>4</sup> "Every development at ITV in the run-up to 1993 reflects assimilation to the US network model: the rating or death ethos, the reduction or rejection of in-house production, the marginalisation of public



*Richard and Judy*. However, despite the different production formats I would suggest that these programmes in Britain, do seem to share some generic qualities. There is a general emphasis on the 'ordinary', on people's lives and on the everyday. There seems to be a loose generic 'fit' between different daytime programmes in a way that cannot, for instance describe 'evening programming'.

One reason for this 'generic fit' resides in the conscious way in which daytime programmes refer to, and inter-link with, one another. For instance, during the morning Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan will do two live 'promo' slots to trail that day's programme before it starts at 10.30am. One of these 'promos' is at 9.25 am, and another at 9.53, preceding the programme before *This Morning*. At the end of this short slot they, and not the usual voice over announcer of the station, introduce the next programme, the chat show *Vanessa*,<sup>5</sup> Vanessa Feltz in turn reintroduces them at the end of her show:

[Richard and Judy take us through the different segments of the programme...]

Richard: ...weh, heh, you can go to Jamaica on us - a holiday for two if you answer a really silly question later, and it's that woman again, she's still curing America of their sex problems and she can make the earth move for you as well - so its a phone-in with Dr. Ruth on that number, no names, no ( ) you can use a pseudonym. And we'll be coming barelling right back at you at ten past ten this morning but right now its time for young Vanessa.

[Cut to Vanessa alone in a different studio]

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service output, the need to develop sponsor friendly projects, the drive for bulk production of successful 'programme brands'." (Dugdale and Saynor (7/12/92 *The Guardian*))

<sup>5</sup> Vanessa Feltz was a features presenter on *This Morning* for a year and a half until she was offered her own chat show, *Vanessa*. Her programme has subsequently been replaced by *Trisha* a similar audience participation chat show.

Vanessa: On today's Vanessa we'll meet the tough women who work as bouncers and we'll be asking, 'Can butch ever be sexy?' Their families say no and they want them to babe it up before they're beat up. That's today's Vanessa.

[cut to title sequence] ...

[At the end of *Vanessa*....]

Vanessa: [To guest] All right, I wish you good luck with everything.

[To camera] That's all we've got time for. Stand by for *This Morning*, lots of love, bye, bye.

[7/7/98]

This inter-linking between shows and their presenters helps facilitate the 'liveness' of morning television and assist its appearance as a flowing package, rather than as discrete texts. Such a conscious fusing of programmes exaggerates Raymond Williams concept of 'flow'<sup>6</sup> and also supports my definition of daytime - particularly morning - programming as a distinct object of study.

It may also be the perceived female audience which facilitates such a grouping of programmes<sup>7</sup> and I would argue that they do share certain features in common which make them appealing to women. My justification, therefore, for grouping together *This Morning* and *Good Morning* (magazine programmes) with *Kilroy*, *The Time...The Place* and *Vanessa* (audience participation programmes) is that while they are clearly different textually in form and structure, they do share wider themes in common. This follows Stephen Neale's suggestion that:

Genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject (1991:6)

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<sup>6</sup>Williams (1974) characterises television as emitting a constant fragmentary stream, unlike the unitary texts offered by cinema.

<sup>7</sup>Perhaps this operates in a similar way to which we refer to 'women's magazines'.

It is this wider definition of genre that I intend to work with here, since it allows me to explore the commonalities in the relationship between text and audience that emerge under this assemblage of texts which I will refer to as morning talk-based programming. Mostly it is the emphasis on the importance of conversation and the urge to talk about the everyday and the personal that provides a common ground which leads to co-scheduling.

As discussed in Chapter One, one of the driving forces within feminist media studies was to 'rescue' denigrated women's practices. Rather than to accept a conceptualisation of female audiences as duped and naive, feminist authors have made sense of viewing practices within the daily lives of women (Hobson 1980; Brunsdon 1981; Modleski 1983 and Seiter et al. 1989). Mostly concerned with soap opera viewing they conclude that the cultural capital required belongs to culturally inscribed feminine traits such as sensitivity, perception, intuition and the necessary privileging of the concerns of personal life (Brunsdon, 1981).

Morning talk-based television can be seen as similar to soap opera in its orientation to the daily and the personal. Viewers are encouraged to call in and discuss topics that belong to the domain of 'feminine' interests. *This Morning's* first program had a phone-in on women and careers and within twenty minutes there were more than 500 calls (Malone, 1996). Both *Good Morning* and *This Morning* invited 'ordinary' people (most often women) in the studio to discuss specific issues and problems. For instance, victims of abuse or victims of serious medical errors could be sitting on the sofa in one segment and lottery winners and women who want a style make-over in the next. On



the 'talk show' format the emphasis of the programming is to invite 'lay' people to discuss contemporary issues from female sterilisation to jealous husbands. The construction of such a format obviously deserves more attention but what I want to stress at this juncture is that the fundamental principle governing daytime television in the UK in the mid to late 1990s is the urge to 'talk' usually about issues that strike a chord with the feminine domestic world.<sup>8</sup> Given this surge towards talk-based, specifically morning programming,<sup>9</sup> I want to concentrate here on the emergence of a 'talk' genre which targets women.

### 3.3 Popular debate - criticism

Popular media debate about this relatively new space for programming during the morning and afternoon has often generated fierce, barbed criticism. It is resonant of a common debate about the increasing tabloidisation of culture which has been held "responsible for everything from voter apathy to family breakdown" (Lumby 1997:117). Its concentration on personalities and chat has led commentators to describe it as 'stupidvision' or 'tepid dishwater soup' that is apparently tame and patronising:

It is Stupidvision - where most of the presenters look like they have to pretend to be stupid because they think their audience is. In other words, it patronises. It talks to the vacuum cleaner and the washing machine and the microwave, without much contact with the human brain.

(Toynbee 1996, *Radio Times*)

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<sup>8</sup> *This Morning*, for instance, during the period of my research, was sponsored by British Telecom and was therefore continually framed by the advertising slogan, 'Its good to talk'.

<sup>9</sup> I take for my discussion an assumption about terrestrial television. Of course such a description may not fit for growing cable and digital television provision. At the time of my study, none of my participants had access to either cable, satellite or digital television within the home.

This 'coffee-time TV', as it has become labelled, has even induced criticism from production executives responsible for its existence. The chief executive officer of Carlton TV, Andy Allen, (one of the original members of the Daytime Committee that commissioned *This Morning*) likens the daytime chat shows *Good Morning* and *This Morning* to "a flotation tank where you are able to relax by being robbed of all sensory experience" and a "dull and predictable wasteland".<sup>10</sup>

Lumby (1997) argues that such a vilification of everything that is associated with the private and personal world is part of a traditional paternalistic conception of the public sphere which privileges the world of business, economics, medicine, science etc. and wants to regulate what it deems is appropriate for us to consume. Huyssen (1986), in his account of the tracing of this mass culture/femininity association as having its particular roots within the tradition of Modernism, describes how:

Time and time again documents from the late nineteenth century ascribe pejorative feminine characteristics to mass culture [...] It is easy to see how such statements rely on the traditional notion that women's aesthetic and artistic abilities are inferior to those of men. (1986:194/5)

In relation to morning chat programmes, this question needs to be thought about carefully. It is the association with the private world of issues about relationships, women's sexuality and the family which invokes such aggressive rhetoric, coupled with its association with idle chatter and 'gossip'. Clearly this echoes feminist concerns about the de-valuation of women's speech as discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in *The Scotsman* 24/7/96 originally quoted from the *Daily Mirror* in 1995.

Is programming that has targeted women audiences at home in the daytime mind-numbing and patronising? The implication for feminists is that this assumes women who are at home to be stupid and dull, conforming to all the worst stereotypes of the domestic housewife. Most commentators refer to the programmes as valuable only in that they offer a purely soporific quality which lulls a passive audience with its banality.

However, there is also a contradiction here. On the one hand these talk-based programmes are banal, but on another level they are conceived as potentially dangerous. For many popular discussions 'talk is cheap' and part of the 'cultural rot' which is setting into a commercial culture. In America, Senator Lieberman, a democrat, told a press conference that: "Talk is cheap and too often on these shows it is also demeaning, exploitative, perverted, divisive and immoral."<sup>11</sup> Lieberman speaks as a member of a group known as 'Empower America' which campaign against the apparent tidal wave of culturally perverse chatter engulfing broadcasting (Shattuc, 1997). Whilst there is no such formal organisation in the UK as yet, it is easy to see the comparable elitist tones in the criticisms outlined above.

There seems to me to be a critical convergence of relevant feminist issues that may be explored through an analysis of this type of morning scheduling. The programmes themselves are trivialised and de-valued within the time-honoured tradition of disparaging mass culture as feminine. (And it is within this framework that the feminist re-evaluation of soap opera has taken place.) The other dimension, discussed in Chapter Two, is the problematic nature within which women's speech has been understood as trivial and deficient. As discussed earlier the politics of speech for women is a

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Lumby (1997), p122.



contentious issue - the fact that women are encouraged to talk and also derided for their talk simultaneously provides a double-bind which could also be resonant in the popular discourses about daytime television. Therefore, it is because daytime talk programming contains both the political issues of the denigration of a 'feminine' genre, as well as the denigration of *perceived* feminine modes of speech that it becomes a particularly relevant object for feminist study.

### **3.4 Theorising talk-based programming - the academic debates**

Here, I will review some of the dominant ways in which the talk show genre has been theorised. Generally speaking, there is division within academic evaluations of these kinds of participatory programming. For some authors the genre offers a new, potentially democratic space affording the citizen rights to public address normally denied them. This has sometimes been discussed in terms of a feminist project of 'consciousness raising' for women. For others talk shows offer potentially dangerous pleasures which privilege psychological discussion without appropriate support or sociological reasoning. One could suggest that it is the talk show's refusal to conform to regular generic rules which opens it up to so many different readings:

Generally the talk show has become something the press, film-makers and academicians love to hate. Its play with discursive boundaries and identities, with chaos and contingency have made it threatening to critics desperate for clear labels and stable structures - in other words, for a representational "purity" the talk show will not allow. (Munson, 1993:111)

For Munson the chaotic nature of the talk show is emblematic of its status as a postmodern phenomenon of the advanced industrial age, resisting definition, avoiding

linear discussion and conclusions, and disrupting older orders of authority by privileging common-sense over professional, expert discourses.

Attempting to chart a description of critical accounts of the talk show phenomenon is problematic due to the nature of the explosion of different forms talk on our screens. As Munson suggests the talk show almost defies description due to its amorphous nature. Some commentators have ignored the distinctions between talk shows (Livingstone and Lunt,1994 and Carpignano et. al.,1990) but more recently academics have seen the distinctions between different formats as crucial to understanding them. Haarman (1999) refers to the term 'talk show' as a portmanteau term which has been used to describe a range of formats including, "conversation between elite peers, round table or group discussions, interviews, debates, topical discussions between experts and ordinary people, and talk between people, normally not peers, with interventions from a studio audience"(1999:1). Such complex variety suggests that they are responding to a growing cultural phenomenon around a televisual incitement to 'talk'. This has also resulted in a variety of responses about how to interpret the cultural significance of such an explosive multi-dimensional niche of broadcasting.

### **3.5 The talk show and democratic participation**

The most positive evaluation comes from understanding the talk show as offering democratic potential. In its various forms it encourages a constellation of voices broadening access to discussion for the 'ordinary' citizen as well as providing a space where public figures can be forced to confront the populace. The general understanding of the talk show in such a way stems from a concept of an ideal public sphere where the privileged 'right to speak' becomes de-hierarchised.



Theorising the talk show in these terms has, in some instances, drawn upon Habermas' concept of the bourgeois public sphere. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas (1989) gives an historical account of how the conditions born out of the genesis of capitalism allowed the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Habermas argues that along with the development of capitalism evolved a distinction between the modern state and civil society that provided a democratic space for a clear sense of a public sphere. The public sphere here therefore refers to, "the emergence of a critical and independent public domain, a space formed between the economy and the state in which public opinion could be formed and thus exert influence over the government"(McLaughlin,1993:41). The presence of such a critical arena was seen by Habermas to exist in the coffee-houses and salons where male members of the bourgeoisie and intellectuals met to discuss works of literature. Here political discourse formed itself around rational debate and opened up a space for social debate that had previously been denied under the feudal system. Despite these meeting places having exclusionary criteria, Habermas was convinced of their critical capacity beyond the confines of the state as a space for public participatory discourse.

However, Habermas was less optimistic about political debate in the twentieth century where the mass media can be thought of as constituting the public sphere. In this account he suggests that the public sphere has undergone a process of 're-feudalisation' which he claims has been secured by the mass media's focus on the element of 'spectacle'. The commodification of culture has transformed representative politics into 'performance' removed from the lives of the populace. This account invokes the



formation of the ideological category of the 'public' as an 'uncritical mass' disinterested in political participation. It is resonant in many evaluations which see a demise of conventional politics and a 'crisis of public communication' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

Some accounts of the talk show can be understood within this critical framework and possibly those media critics discussed earlier would see the talk show as emblematic of the demise of the public sphere. For some American commentators the talk show in its various guises intervenes directly in the political system as electoral candidates are encouraged to do the 'talk show circuit'. Howard Kurtz (1996) gives a thorough account of how such processes are deeply embedded in the American political system. They are a staple focus for electioneering and punditry. He suggests that politicians grow obsessed with 'winning the week' by appearing on talk shows as a new political platform. Clearly Kurtz would echo Habermas' fear of the 'spectacle' within an increased commercialisation of politics as "the political effort to 'sell' an initiative on the talk circuit begins to over shadow the substance of the proposal itself" (1996:5).

The issue of spectacle/participation is central to media studies and has most often been associated with the presence of television. One cannot ignore what Dahlgren (1995) refers to as television's 'entertainment bias'. However, in terms of the talk show, the critical distancing of performance and audience embedded within this bias has been re-evaluated. Carpignano et. al. suggest that in the mediated culture of the late twentieth century it is "*the spectacle itself that is in crisis*" (1991:35) and they give a series of examples in current media forms whereby the classic distinctions between spectacle and spectator are becoming eroded; for instance, the transparency of production techniques

(cues to camera operators etc.) and the reduction of news reporters to commentators in TV news formats that have become increasingly conversational. Within these changes therefore the talk show becomes the prime example of the dissolution of older conventions of spectatorship as the boundaries between performer and viewer are blurred in a genre where the studio audience are also the performers. For these authors therefore, "the talk show is the most eloquent example of the crisis of theatricality" (1990:49).

These re-assessed circumstances allow an evaluation of the talk show as an 'exercise in electronic democracy' because it offers a space with seemingly few exclusionary practices that allows the participation of the general public in political debate (Carpignano et. al.,1990). Perhaps even more democratic than the bourgeois public sphere, the talk show's constellation and diversity of voices arguably opens up a forum which challenges traditional hierarchical organisation of rights to speak. Many talk shows invite a large studio audience of 'lay' people to take an active role in the discussion of the topic of the day. Ordinary people and representative experts from various institutions and organisations, politicians, doctors, counsellors, executives take part in the production of 'live talk'. Here lies the phenomenon that shapes a democratic evaluation of the talk show. Here is a space where rank, class and expert status are subordinated to debate and 'authentic' experience. This suggests a space unlike any other, where contact between the state and the populace can sometimes be direct and open.

The contributions of lay people, usually in narrative form, therefore are juxtaposed with the discourses of the institutions that organise them. The talk show offers a unique



space whereby the traditional polarisation of public and private is eroded. In Habermasian terms therefore, the 'life-world' (lived experiences of citizens) and the 'system' (state representatives) are brought together in such a way that might be of mutual benefit for the common good. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) pursue such a reading of the talk show:

Communication between representatives of the system world and the life-world establishes links between those realms and so potentially generates critical knowledge which could overcome the separation of these realms. (1994:180)

Livingstone and Lunt go further to argue that 'lay' contributions to the discourse even take priority over those of the experts. Carpignano et. al. agree that talk shows afford a primacy to 'common sense' rather than to institutionally affected 'registers'. Hosts continually appeal to expert representatives to speak plainly. Again this accords with a liberal concept of an ideal public sphere which Habermas refers to:

Habermas prizes conversation, reading and plain speech as worthy forms of discourse for a democratic culture and is frankly hostile to theatre, courtly forms, ceremony, the visual and rhetoric more generally. (Peters, 1993:562).

This element of the communicative conversational form of the talk show that stresses the relevance of experience becomes central to the rest of this thesis.

### **3.6 The talk show as feminist public sphere**

Characteristics of the talk show which suggest its privileging of 'common sense' and everyday life-world experiences, have led to a feminist interest in the form as an



oppositional public sphere. Several discussions such as those above which invoke the suggestion of the talk show's position within participatory politics, have engaged with the feminist debates surrounding conceptualisation of the public sphere. If the talk show indeed blurs boundaries between the public and private then one might consider this within the context of feminist evaluations of the public/private dichotomy.

It is within the feminist movement that there has been the most thorough critique of conceptions of the public sphere. The distinction between 'private' and 'public' as binary opposites has led to the marginalisation in mainstream politics of issues central to women's lives. As Landes suggests, these labels are fundamental to the separation of two spheres:

The term 'public' suggests the opposite of 'private': that which pertains to the people as a whole, the community, the common good, things open to sight, and those things that are accessible and shared by all. Conversely, the 'private' signifies something closed and exclusive, as in the admonition 'Private property - no trespassing'. (1998:1/2)

In these terms, the two spheres of the public and the private, are often associated with essentialising characteristics of masculine and feminine realms that usually depend upon 'woman' symbolising nature and 'man' symbolising culture (Ortner, 1974/1998). Through this logic, the inferiority of nature structures the patriarchal inequality of women:

Humankind attempts to transcend a merely natural existence so that nature is always seen as of a lower order than culture. Culture becomes identified as the creation and the world of men because women's biology and bodies place them closer to nature than men, and because their

child-rearing and domestic tasks, dealing with unsocialised infants and with raw materials, bring them into closer contact with nature. Women and the domestic sphere thus appear inferior to the cultural sphere and male activities, and women are seen as necessarily subordinate to men.

(Pateman, 1989:124/125)

In terms of democratic participation then, men take part in serious, rational, political debate whilst women are associated with the emotional realm of the domestic.

However, feminism has sought to raise awareness of the problems of such a simplifying division since actions in the public realm impact directly upon the private world, not least in areas such as welfare politics (Fraser, 1989 and Pateman, 1989). Furthermore, serious political issues of power are embedded within the private sphere. Issues around the family, the body, domestic labour and sexuality have been central to feminist concerns about the entrenchment of the dominant laws of patriarchy. Such a focus can be found in many of the central feminist texts of the 1970s, particularly in Kate Millet's profound re-evaluation of the politics of power in *Sexual Politics*:

This essay does not define the political as that relatively narrow and exclusive world of meetings, chairman and parties. The term 'politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons are controlled by another (1970:124).

Therefore, feminism's attention to politicising the private domain as essential to a true understanding of women's lives has to some extent successfully disrupted the firm division between public and private that has been central to liberal and republican politics. Within this discussion the talk show's commitment to the personal and private world has led to some conceptualisation of the genre as potentially progressive for women.

### 3.7 The talk show as women's therapy

Another kind of discussion that has focussed on the concept of the talk show as 'therapeutic' has mainly concentrated on the daytime talk show e.g. *Donahue*, *Oprah*, *Sally Jesse Raphael* etc. and has been concerned with a more feminised conceptualisation of the talk show (Shattuc, 1997). However, the academic debate on the feminist possibilities of talk-as-therapy has been divided between suggestions either of an alternative feminised public sphere or a more critical indictment of the spectacle of the event which transforms social inequality into personal psychological trauma. Oprah Winfrey has been seen to champion the feminist cause in the 'TV-talk-as-therapy-genre' (Masciarotte, 1991, Squire, 1994, Landeman, 1995, Shattuc, 1997), whilst more cynical readings of the show again see the spectacle as dominating the discourse whereby the individual's pain is used as a voyeuristic commercial proposition. In this case the personal and emotional is understood as an exercise in postmodern mimicry where pain and tears are false gestures to meet televisual requirements (White, 1992; McLaughlin, 1993; Peck, 1995).

Masciarotte's (1991) more celebratory interpretation of *Oprah Winfrey* suggests that cultural critics may fear the talk show on these terms because it may present an alternative version of the articulation of identity through its suggestion of a mass subject. For Masciarotte the *Oprah Winfrey Show* "begins to articulate a significantly different politics of the subject which re-inscribes the 'making of the self' in terms of mass subjectivity" (1991:83). In this case the collective experience of 'telling yourself' in the programme resembles the terms of women's consciousness raising groups of the 1970s, an experience whereby the individual shifts from private citizen to social citizen.



Understanding the feminisation of the talk show in these terms provides an interesting dimension to the central focus of this thesis. According to Spender (1984) the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s were always regarded with suspicion by men but have been undeniably productive within the women's movement and central to feminist action. Spender's discussion also suggests that it is the form which discussion in C-R groups take, that is also central to their success because they offer a space where women are taken seriously as speakers and their experiences as talkers and listeners are validated. In these terms televisual arenas that support women's talk can be understood as a feminised oppositional public sphere where, as within the women's movement, the 'personal' is validated. Mellencamp argues, "It's not too far fetched to imagine daytime talk as the electronic syndicated version of consciousness raising groups of the women's movement" (1990:218). For example, Phil Donahue is proud of his programme's debt to the liberal American feminist movement of the 1960s (Shattuc,1997) and Oprah Winfrey has claimed that her show presents an unrivalled space for black woman's perspectives (Squire, 1994).

This view of the talk show as a mediated form of consciousness-raising, is also reinforced by its claim to offer multi-accentuated discourses - an alternative method of structuring debate to those recognisable in more 'masculine' forms of discussion. The foregrounding of narrative, multiple voices and non-linear discussion directly represents an "interruption in the classical strategies of knowledge construction, information gathering and proof through argumentation" (Masciarotte, 1991:90). Oprah Winfrey, for example, exhibits a good deal of empathy: "she touches audience members a lot, cries and laughs, and they touch, laugh and cry back" which, according to Squire (1994), is both feminine and feminist in its insistence on personal intimacy.

The talk show's connection with a feminist conscience has been further documented by Shattuc who suggests that their principal social aim is to build women's self esteem, confidence and identity in a space where advice is shared within the group and not handed down from above (1997:122). Here, the therapeutic discourse offered by the talk show draws upon Freud's concept of the 'talking cure' re-routed within feminist therapy:

Feminist therapy turns the humanist concept of self-actualisation around and places it within a critique of social constraint. Feminism named the process 'empowerment', which has become a central discourse of talk shows. In fact an audience member jumped up during a discussion of bad husbands and announced to Oprah: "Its about power and empowerment".

(Shattuc,1997:123)

More generally however, Mimi White (1992) sees a trend of therapeutic discourse running through much contemporary American television, from *Oprah Winfrey* to *The Simpsons*. In her analysis this therapeutic discursive space for the constitution of (feminine) identities relies on an overwhelming concentration on the 'confession' in modern societies. Following Foucault's (1978) argument whereby one can understand the confession as a structure of speech that enacts self-identity, White argues that:

Contemporary deployments of therapeutic and confessional discourses produced through TV apparatus modify and recognise the very nature of therapy and confession as practices for producing social and individual identities and knowledge. (1992:7)

The primacy of the narrative form as outlined above by Masciarotte becomes part of the therapeutic discourse. Thus the confession through the telling of your own experience



becomes part of the process of recovery and empowerment, but as White suggests, this may, from a Foucauldian point of view, be seen as a more cynical apparatus of discursive self-government.

### **3.8 The talk show as ideological spectacle**

Not all academics therefore have confirmed the positive conceptualisations of talk show discourse as either presenting an oppositional public sphere or as providing an empowering space for women. Some arguments are reminiscent of the discussion that has surfaced before in this thesis, and relates to a central feature of these shows that can often be ignored. They are after all *televised*, commercial products and any theorisation of them must be understood within the institutional context from which they emerge. For Mimi White (1992) one cannot extricate the talk show debate from the consumer culture within which it and its viewers operate:

Television offers a double-edged intervention. It is perhaps more crass and thorough in its commodity/consumer operations than prior forms of therapeutic engagement, and apparently more totalising. All viewers are always already inexorably caught up in the confessional mode and also in the consumer culture that it supports. (1992:183)

In White's conclusions the utilisation of therapeutic discourse within the structure of television's commodity ethic, what she calls 'crass consumerism', means that speaking for oneself is not always what it seems.

McLaughlin's (1993) critique of Carpignano et.al.'s essay locates their thesis of an oppositional public sphere within a 'populist cultural studies' position naively obsessed



with valorising the genre. She takes issue with their particular celebration of the talk show's elevation of 'common-sense' as facilitating multiple and diverse discourses.

At the very least the notion of 'common sense' provides insufficient grounds for the assertion that the talk show has become a site for discursive activity as a new kind of public sphere. (1993:46)

McLaughlin's discussion analyses the construction of common sense in discourses about sexuality. While she acknowledges the presence of a liberal feminism on these shows, she also suggests that the extent of 'liberalness' does not go as far as to promote 'empowering' discourses. The talk show's liberal emphasis might allow the presence of marginalised groups - prostitutes, homosexuals, working mothers - but the common sense discourses produced about them are anything but progressive. Rather, the presence of these labels act confrontational devices in the talk shows over-riding primacy of the 'spectacle'. In the case of the representation of sex workers on the *Joan Rivers Show*:

Attention to sexual techniques and techniques of the body is prevalent in talk shows featuring sex work; in the talk show topics and issues are subsumed under spectacle, as the reasons for a woman's entering prostitution and its status as labor become buried under talk about techniques of oral sex and fingernail polish color. (McLaughlin, 1993:50)

Thus, the focus on confrontation within the televised spectacle might allow for conflicting voices but rarely does this produce debate that can be conceived as progressive and meaningful for women. Simply allowing working class people space to vent 'common sense' opinions does not necessarily mean that we have a new forum free of dominant hegemonic practices since, and most centrally to her argument, McLaughlin points out that common sense discourses are contaminated by, and indeed

dependant on, 'official discourses'. She argues that because "representational apparatus promote 'normal' categories and discourage other ways of seeing, is it at all possible to locate alternative discourses in the talk show or any other genre?" (1993:50/51).

In this reading therefore the talk show simply reinforces traditionally motivated ideologies whilst presenting a gesture to access and participation. For many feminist authors this represents a serious problem. Janice Peck (1995) suggests that the ideological process of the talk show is carried out through this mooting of therapeutic discourse. This emphasis on therapy, as outlined by Shattuc (1997) above, is indebted to the kind of Freudian psychotherapy resonant in the 'talking cure' which, Peck points out, is not in itself entirely value-free. Some critics have suggested that, "a chief function of psychology and the therapy industry is normalisation - the production of 'well-adjusted' subjects appropriate to the modern capitalist order" (1995:60).<sup>12</sup> This has a particular gendered inflection as women have been traditionally over represented as clients within the therapy industry as well as consumers of an overwhelming amount of literature on self-help and cognitive development.<sup>13</sup>

The particular emphasis on feminine talk, sharing and consciousness-raising emerges here with less of a progressive edge. According to Peck, the talk show's reliance on the lay narrative personalises the discussion in individual psychological terms, ignoring the social conditions from which the experience has emerged. Therapeutic intervention thus placates political problems, ideologically locating the social as personal dilemma:

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, among others, Peck cites, Sampson, E.E (1981) *Cognitive Psychology as Ideology* *American Psychologist*, 36, Plenum Press.

<sup>13</sup> See also Cameron, D (1995a) Verbal Hygiene.

Therapeutic discourse translates the political into the psychological - problems are personal (or familial) and have no origin or target outside one's own psychic processes [...] In so doing, these programs participate in reproducing the 'ideological field' of contemporary society, as well as its structure of domination. (1995:75/76)

This raises an interesting counter-reading to the former suggestion of the talk show as constituting a liberal feminist public sphere. Invoking the 'personal' is not enough to evoke the political, since in this discussion personal experience is only ever inscribed in the therapeutic practice of finding catharsis, not suggestive of political action.

For Elspeth Probyn (1990), liberal talk shows which address women's issues (among other contemporary television programmes, like *Thirtysomething* or *The Wonder Years*) speak to a discourse of 'post-feminism' which she suggests brings with it a conscious re-articulation of the family home as a 'new traditionalism'. This post-feminist discourse suggests that women are consciously using their relatively new found rights of choice within consumer culture to return to the home. When deconstructing a segment of *Oprah Winfrey* in which a woman quite openly describes her experience as a victim of rape on a subway, Probyn utilises Williams' (1974) concept of flow to describe how the broadcasting space which assumes women watching alone at home, reproduces that relationship in its programming:

One of the most horrifying potential situations for women, rape is articulated with mundane images of women and home - mad housewives in the supermarket, competition over hair color, lonely women conjuring up strange hunks to share their diet drinks - making the home *unheimlich* (uncanny). (1993:279)



In these recent spaces for women's programming, the foregrounding of 'women's issues' takes place in the wider context of the repetitious reinforcement of traditional conceptualisations of the female subject, a process she refers to as 'sexage'. This certainly accords with the growing trend within daytime media forms to reflect the environment of the home in the programming. As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, in magazine style programmes, it is not just that the content of discussion raises the domestic in primarily feminine concerns, but also the physical space of the set mirrors the home environment. *This Morning* and *Good Morning* construct a physical presence of home in the studio. The presenters sit on sofas with the usual paraphernalia, lamps, plants and ornaments that signify cosy domesticity.

It seems that Probyn's argument here presents a direct challenge to contemporary evaluations within feminist criticism of feminine forms. There has been a growth in television programming which proudly proclaims itself as 'female-centred' which some have referred to as a feminisation of television. Thus, in *Popular Reality*, John Hartley (1996) suggests that the traditional public sphere is being replaced by a feminised, consumerist version of popular entertainment. Media analysts have thus taken on board a concept of the 'feminine' as means of deconstructing the text.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Probyn herself draws upon Fiske's (1987) argument in *Television Culture* that soap operas apply a 'feminine aesthetic' because of their lack of narrative closure and multiplicity of plots. The point therefore is that:

These feminine genres can even allow women to learn and practice their feminine 'skills': 'they provide training in the feminine skills of 'reading people', and are the means of exercising the

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<sup>14</sup> Probyn links this with Meaghan Morris' (1988) essay 'Banality on Cultural Studies', suggesting that it is due to a poverty of critical vocabulary.

feminine ability to understand the gap between what is said and what is meant. (Probyn,1990, citing Fiske,1987)

However, embedded within Probyn's argument is the possibility that within the discursive articulation of the normality of the home is also a curious subverting presence. The normalising ideology itself allows the presence of subversion:

In the void left by the banishment of feminism, we can see an endless fascination about that abject object, the feminine. Against the representations of happy normality, the world continues in all of its weirdness [...] the afternoon representation of rape, insists upon the shock of gender as it allows for the scope of gendered responses. In playing on women's fears, these discourses and events also change them. The shock of gender gives heart to the body. (1993:282)

It represents a double bind that in celebrating the feminine, these texts also assume a traditional feminine subjectivity. Probyn does not however, suggest that we simply write them off as ideological replay, but that they have to be considered within the wider, changing cultural climate which we inhabit.

### **3.9 Beyond judgement - investigating talk in 'Talk TV'**

The feminist debates on the talk show thus seem to have reached something of an impasse. Tolson (in press) argues that, "In one argument *Oprah* is progressive because it transcends social structures; on the other hand it is regressive because it fails critically to engage with them". He therefore suggests moving the debate away from either moral judgement or celebration. I would argue that it is impossible to make such clearly defined distinctions, because the nature of talk show is such that it can encapsulate all such evaluations, at different moments in time, even within the same show. Watching

the shows, that I am concerned with here, I find that at one moment, I feel that the discussion has been usefully brought into the public realm, offering sound (feminist) advice which adheres to both social responsibility as well as psychological need, and then at another moment I am confounded by a regressive 'common-sense' assumption put forward, not just by a 'lay' member or a host, but by 'experts' - doctors, MP's, therapists. It seems therefore that the struggle for the 'meaning' of the talk show, in the way that one normally deconstructs the text, is futile, since the talk show resists definition through its relatively unstable shifts in discourse.

Instead, why not begin with the dominant factor that often gets pushed aside in these evaluative debates, the *talk* of the talk show itself? Carbaugh (1988) for instance offers a more 'ethno-linguistic' perspective on *Donahue* arguing that the communication of personal problems on the show offers a specific cultural discourse that he describes as 'talking American'. Therefore, in this thesis, rather than searching for an encoded meaning embedded within the text, I suggest taking the communication itself as the starting point for the analysis. Since the talk show (and I would argue that British morning talk is no exception) is particularly oriented to 'women demographics' (Shattuc, 1997), then I intend to investigate exactly how such an address is invested in the discourse itself.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the growth of daytime programming in Britain and argued for the generic 'orientation' of the 9am-12noon morning slot as being primarily concerned with foregrounding experiential talk. This kind of programming has been the subject of much popular abuse which can be located within discussions of a tabloid



(feminised) culture. I outlined other various academic positions on the talk show which range from democratic public sphere, feminist consciousness raising therapy, spectacular voyeurism, ideological self-regulation and finally a reinvention of the home for women in a new traditionalism, which are primarily focussed on evaluating the genre either for or against.

How then can we think about this televising of personal private talk in terms of a feminist politics if the talk show throws up such contradictory readings? Are they simply the result of the polysemic text that at times this call to talk can be empowering and at other times ideologically problematic? What then should one do with this genre that reinforces the domestic and the everyday within very traditional conceptualisations of the femininity and the home, but which at the same time offers a discursive space to speak about the private which brings female-centred issues to the fore where there are few spaces elsewhere for such debate to take place? It seems to me that the talk show cannot be tied down to one reading of whether or not it is progressive and that possibly such a struggle would be futile.

There is, however a consistent element throughout this discussion. That is that these programmes rely on talk, on ordinary people talking in a 'televisual' space, and yet (with some notable exceptions, e.g. Livingstone and Lunt, 1994) few critics draw our attention to how this takes place. The talk on *Oprah* or *This Morning* cannot replicate women's consciousness raising groups merely through its emphasis on the private world, since it is at once transformed by the nature of the 'spectacle'. These are *televised* talk spaces and the phenomenon of the talk in its institutional context requires further complication. In the next chapter therefore, I intend to propose an alternative

methodology through which to analyse this domestic re-positioning of women as reproduced through talk.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Media Texts as 'Communicative Events'**

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter I argued for the central focus of the analysis of talk TV to be concentrated on the 'talk' itself. However, it is not simply 'talk' but talk produced for broadcasting which is received in multiple domestic settings. Therefore, I suggest considering this mid-morning television in terms of its communicative function as a televised, spectacular event and an event that flows into the daily context of the home that also reflects and reconstructs the domestic setting. Here I will pull together some of the threads running through the discussion so far to consider how such an emphasis on private experiences and everyday conversational practices, articulates itself as a televised text in a domestic context. In reproducing the homely and domestic, how does daytime television programming establish a communicative strategy with a largely female audience?

In this chapter, therefore, it is necessary to discuss the phenomenon of television's communicative ethos in contemporary culture and then describe how such a communicative phenomenon can be analysed in terms of interactive features of language and discourse. However, it is difficult to find the appropriate tools for such an analysis, especially given the added gendered perspective that such a focus on daytime TV requires. This is due to the fact that research on discourse is an extremely diverse field and that, as I mentioned in Chapter One, work on media discourse has rarely considered the relationship between language and gender. I therefore draw some linguistic approaches from scholars



interested in 'broadcast talk' as a phenomenon and attempt to explain the methodology for my subsequent textual analysis.

#### **4.1 The media and everyday life**

As I discussed in Chapter Three, Carpiagnano et. al. (1990) suggest that the 'spectacle' of the public sphere has come into crisis through developments in televisual apparatus. For them contemporary media culture is experiencing a dramatic shift around traditional conceptions of spectatorship. They suggest that cues such as the visibility of production processes, nods to the camera man, conversational imperatives and visible errors are endemic of a breakdown of the spectacle/spectator distinction. According to them, the spectator has a different relationship with the text, one that is more open and accessible and potentially more democratic in new news formats and audience participation programmes. This has an important impact upon thinking about communicative strategies of broadcasting since they suggest that the phenomenon is bringing about "new social relationships of communication embodied in the television medium, which have progressively undermined the structural dichotomy between performance and audience" (1990:35).

How then can we think of these 'new social relationships' built by television's forms?

Traditional semiotic tools from media studies, which illuminate symbolic meaning, cannot help us here. More useful is a perspective generated by authors such as Meyrowitz (1985) and Thompson (1994,1995) who think about the media in terms of its communicative impact upon daily life. These authors locate such a phenomenon within wider conceptual themes presented by late modernity.

For instance, John Thompson (1994) calls for a social theory of the media that reaches beyond traditional schools of thought descended from structuralism and semiotics, which I argued in Chapter Two led to a focus on the politics of representation rather than on the micro-politics of interaction. Whilst no doubt concern with the consequences of the media's ideological messages has produced substantive insights into the media's practices in making meaning, not least within feminist readings, it nevertheless has limitations for understanding the media's communicative impact. Thompson suggests that there is a poverty of resources in thinking about the way in which the media is embedded within the social world and is part of daily communicative action:

One is left with the impression that, for most social theorists, the media are like the air that we breathe: pervasive, taken-for-granted, yet rarely thought about as such. (Thompson, 1994:27)

Refusing some of the dominant paradigms which have overly concentrated on the determining effect of the media as a form of social control, he attempts to describe the way in which the media has had an impact on the nature of social interaction in the modern world.

Bausinger (1984) calls for a similar emphasis within media studies. He suggests that media theory should focus on the significance of the everyday within which media are consumed. He is concerned with the "inconspicuous omnipresence of the technical" (1984:346) and suggests ways in which the media are intricately woven into the daily routines of family life, recalling the father who uses the television to distance himself from the rest of the

family after having a bad day at work. Bausinger's argument connects with other discussion of television as a *domestic* medium. For instance, Silverstone (1996) charts the ways in which the home, the domestic and suburbia are embedded within television's history and form. This necessitates a theorisation of television's place within family relationships (Morley, 1986 and Lull, 1990).

In turn, the space of the home as a site of the reconstruction of patriarchal relations has made gender central to thinking about television and the home. As discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, early feminist analyses of the media were concerned with a focus on the media's part in the fabric of daily life. For instance, Hobson's (1980) pioneering essay exactly intervened in this debate, when she described the importance of the radio in terms of companionship in the lonely space of the home in the daytime, as well as the way in which the scheduling of radio programming helped order the otherwise structureless day of the housewife. A similar theme is echoed by Modleski (1983) in her account of the way in which the soap opera's segmentation reflects the rhythms of domestic labour. It is curious that more contemporary media critics are calling for a more serious consideration of the media and the everyday when it has always been central to the feminist tradition of media research.

#### **4.2 The media and modernity**

Thompson's discussion of the articulation of the everyday within media theory is mostly concerned with a phenomenological approach which attempts to conceptualise the media in



terms of the modern age.<sup>1</sup> The most important factor in this thesis is that the media has played a part in generating new forms of interaction and new kinds of social relationships between individuals.

These have emerged from the changing phenomenological conditions caused by the development of media technologies. Giddens (1990) highlights the characteristics of modernity as partly due to the changes that have occurred in the social arrangements of space and time whereby people inhabiting the pre-modern world would experience time as inextricably bound to a sense of place, whereas the modern era is characterised by 'empty time' - an increasingly globalised sense of temporal arrangements. He refers to this as 'time-space distancing' whereby time and space have become increasingly dislocated in a modern world through the ongoing process of the disembedding of social systems: "by disembedding I mean the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (1990:21).

What then does this mean in terms of the media? Put simply, technological mechanisms have 'lifted' social relations out of face-to-face contexts and 'stretched' them across vast distances. Therefore, we experience events happening at a distance, possibly even at a different moment in time, as though they are 'live'. Dayan and Katz (1992) suggest 'media events' are increasingly choreographed for the cameras as much as for the co-present spectators which means that in fact 'not being there' becomes a significant ceremonial

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<sup>1</sup> Social theorists such as Giddens and others have been reluctant to accept that we now live in a postmodern world, rather they suggest that our society is the outcome of a 'radicalising of modernity' (Giddens and Pierson 1998) which refers to the acceleration of institutional processes over time that is more accurately described as 'late modern'.

experience: "ceremonial space has been reconstituted [...] in the home [...] the huge audience of media events has led to [...] the domestic celebratory form" (1992:146).

Social relationships therefore are no longer confined to the local. We can engage in interaction with distanced and absent speakers where co-present and co-spatial arrangements are no longer required. Whilst at the same time consumption of media takes place in locations distant from each other, the moments of reception are simultaneous. As Moores (1997) points out this can have a huge impact on human relationships and the shaping of individual and collective identities.

Media therefore transform human relationships and offer new social spaces. Meyrowitz (1985) has thought about the consequences of this new space afforded by broadcasting in terms of the impact on women and children who are at various points housebound. He suggests that traditional boundaries of the public and private are blurred by television's 'reach' which brings the outside world into the home "and change[s] both public and domestic spheres" (1986:223). For any feminist reading, the blurring of private and public realms has potentially interesting consequences and Meyrowitz even suggests that the modern era is characterised by the merging of masculinity and femininity:

Electronic media of communication, especially television, have been whittling away at the dividing lines between the male world and the female world and destroying the segregation of spheres that supported traditional notions of 'femininity' (1986:208/209).

The process of 're-embedding' is vital to our understanding of the formation of new social relationships through the mediation of experience. Giddens describes 're-embedding' as "the reappropriation or recasting of disembedded social relations so as to pin them down [...] to local conditions of time and place" (1990:79-80). Moores (1995, 2000) articulates the way in which media theorists might take the concept of re-embedding and apply it to mediated encounters. For instance, Giddens describes how in the modern age we rely upon the trust we place in the institutional representatives of 'expert systems', such as the trust we place in architects as we sit in our homes or in the aircrew as we board a plane. As we, lay individuals, come in to contact with representatives of these expert systems, they engage in 'facework commitments'<sup>2</sup> where we are encouraged to place our trust in them - such as the rehearsed facework of flight attendants as they allay our fears in the air.

According to Moores:

Without pushing Giddens's notion of re-embedding too far [...] we can fruitfully extend his notes on trust in co-present encounters so as to take account of the facework commitments made by media figures in their regular interactions with absent viewers and listeners. (2000:112)

In so doing, Moores argues, we are not drawing upon more problematic concepts of 'simulacrum' and 'hyperreality', as put forward by Baudrillard (1988) and other postmodern theorists, rather we are focusing upon the way in which:

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'face' in interaction derives from Goffman (1967) and is based upon everyday usages, 'losing face' and 'saving face'. Utterances therefore are potentially threatening to someone's face and thus every person has *face needs*. It is particularly pertinent to the rituals of politeness whereby speakers would normally avoid face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987).



The communicative styles of TV and radio are oriented to the everyday realities of viewers and listeners - and in appearing to address their talk and action directly to audiences in local settings of reception, broadcasting's personalities are engaged in the performance of a distinctively modern public drama. (2000:112)

On this basis, I want to draw closer attention to the distinctions Meyrowitz outlines, since the 'locale' that this 'stretching' of experience is ultimately 'pinned down' to, is, in the case of broadcasting, the home, which in terms of daily experience is a specifically gendered space.

#### **4.3 Broadcasting and communication**

Broadcasting has been described as 'an institution in everyday life' (Rath, 1985) that historically has had to find a way of communicating with its audiences appropriately in domestic settings. As Scannell and Cardiff (1991) note, this was not necessarily obvious as early broadcasting in the UK privileged monologue over dialogue. In 1928 Hilda Matheson, as the first Head of Talks at the BBC, conducted experiments which suggested that it was, "useless to address the microphone as if it were a public meeting, or even to read essays or leading articles. The person sitting at the other end expected the speaker to address him personally, simply, almost familiarly, as *man to man*" (Matheson, 1933:75-76 my italics)<sup>3</sup>. The lecture style, as if speaking from a pulpit to a congregation, was deemed inappropriate for a technology of reception embedded within the private space of the home. Broadcasting therefore could not speak to its audience as a unified mass, rather it had to develop modes of addressing its audience personally and intimately.

Scannell (1991) refers to the subsequent development of a broadcasting style as its 'communicative intentionality' which has a double articulation:

It is a communicative interaction between those participating in discussion, interview, game show or whatever and, at the same time, is designed to be heard by absent audiences. (1991a:3)

It is this articulation to the audience that concerns us most in this thesis. Whilst broadcasting is often thought of as one-way communication, from which its ideological imperative has been deemed most efficient, recently some authors have begun to think about its communicative ethos in terms of interaction. Thompson (1994, 1995), has discussed the kind of communicative channels presented by modern media as 'mediated quasi-interaction'. He suggests that "the emergence of various types of electronic media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, face-to-face interaction has been increasingly supplemented by forms of mediated and quasi-interaction" (1994:37). Therefore, across a new time-space continuum, from dispersed physical locales, new forms of interaction are emerging.

Thompson's theory is located within a more recent trend of understanding the media according to the sociological approach usually associated with Giddens. However, one can find a similar understanding of mediated forms of interaction within psychologists Horton and Wohl's (1956) essay on 'para-social interaction', which has recently been the focus of revived interest from media theorists (e.g. Moores, 2000). Both descriptions of either 'para-

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<sup>3</sup> Little wonder that for so long in British broadcasting, masculine modes of address dominated (Corner,

social interaction' or 'mediated quasi interaction' contain prefixes which refer to the monologic character of broadcast communication, that is, its inherent lack of the kind of reciprocity which is characteristic in face-to-face, co-present communication. What concerns these theorists is the way in which there is a *simulation* of *mutual* interaction, what Horton and Wohl call the 'simulacrum' of conversational give and take.

Broadcasting has thus developed a method of communication that can be incorporated within everyday life through its display of implied reciprocal interaction. Horton and Wohl give us some of the definite features which characterise such a relationship. For instance, they suggest that television in particular relies on the enigmatic role of the 'persona' on the screen. The presentation of personalities in this way encourages the formation of 'relationships' with their audiences which approaches intimacy - hence, 'intimacy at a distance'. They suggest that the regularity of their appearance and the direct mode of address with which actors speak to audiences delivers a bond which allows the audience a feeling of 'knowing' them personally. Indeed Langer (1981) takes this notion further suggesting that it is television's 'personality system' in contrast to the star system of the film industry which allows such a relationship to form:

Whereas the star system operates from the realms of the spectacular, the inaccessible, the imaginary, presenting the cinematic universe as 'larger than life', the personality system is cultivated [...] as 'part of life', whereas the star system always has the ability to place distance between itself and its audiences through its insistence on 'the exceptional', the personality system works directly to construct and foreground intimacy and immediacy; whereas contact with stars is unrelentingly



sporadic and uncertain, contact with television personalities has regularity and predictability; whereas stars are always playing 'parts' emphasizing their identity as 'stars' as much - perhaps even more than - the characters they play, television personalities 'play themselves'. (Langer 1981:354-5)

In the world of television therefore, it is the realm of the 'ordinary' that reigns, precisely breaking down traditional concepts of spectatorship and distance that Carpiganano et. al. (1990) describe in relation to the talk show. Therefore, the traditional distancing of spectator and performer is blurred precisely by television's quotidian qualities. Its everyday feeling of intimacy is what makes problematic its theorisation solely in terms of the 'spectacle' of the text.

#### **4.4 Daytime TV - the breakdown of spectacle**

In his history of the talk show, Wayne Munson (1993) describes the way in which the 1960s' American show, *Art Linkletter's House Party*, (which he argues led the way for audience participation programming such as *Donahue*) develops new forms of spectatorship through its involvement of 'ordinary' people, anecdotes and the studio audience:

*House Party* offered the simulated sociality of a 'party' by bringing the housewife into the studio - and the advertised products into her home. The borders between home, stage and marketplace - between spectacle and dialogue - seemed to have collapsed. The co-presence of the spectator's and the host's body and vocality, the performance space, and the media apparatus were all redefining 'spectatorship' by inscribing aspects of folk culture and interpersonal rituals, 'people are funny' storytelling and anecdotal personal experience. (1993:53/54)

This apparent co-presence of the housewife and the studio is explicit in British broadcasting in the mid-morning television that concerns me here. Moores' (1997b) description of the para-social phenomenon in broadcasting draws precisely upon the daytime magazine programme and the talk show. He suggests that, "nowhere is this 'will to ordinariness' more evident than in the presentation of a 1990s daytime magazine programme such as *This Morning*" (1997b:223). He points to some of the textual features which help facilitate this feeling of a para-social relationship. For instance, the show's title draws our attention to the immediacy and co-temporality with which we are to experience its daily programming. The presenters are known by their first names as 'Richard' and 'Judy' as were the presenters of *Good Morning* known as 'Ann' and 'Nick'. Any viewer who has regularly tuned in to these programmes has been privy to intimate knowledge of the presenters as themselves.

For instance, we know that the husband and wife team, Richard and Judy, have young children called Jack and Chloe who have occasionally appeared on the programme and have been brought into the discussion by the presenters to validate their real experience as parents. In terms of a para-social relationship, even though the audience has never necessarily met Richard Madeley, we know intimate details of his vasectomy and his shoplifting charge. Similarly, we know that Ann Diamond once lost a baby to cot death, which again comes back in programme discussion. We know that Denise Roberts, *This Morning's* agony aunt, lost her husband and when she found a new partner, her new relationship and subsequent marriage were part of how she articulated advice on phone-ins in the programme. Richard and Judy even wished the couple good luck on the episode



before their wedding. The personal, private topics that are covered on the shows produce the revealing of presenters' lives as they validate their performance as 'one of us' with ordinary domestic concerns.<sup>4</sup>

Also the organisation of the studio set of *This Morning* and *Good Morning* helps to replay the arena of the domestic. The presenters sit upon sofas with coffee tables, lamps and flowers, suggestive of the domestic space of the living room. Guests sit on armchairs with cups of coffee and are thanked for 'dropping-in' in the same way in which the audience is greeted at the beginning of the show. After the commercial breaks on the ITV show *This Morning* we are welcomed back to share the same space and time of the visitors on the show. Their living room is extended into our living room. The domestic experience of the home is shared within the televisual space of the studio as well as the *real* domestic space of the viewer at home. The space of the studio is 'lifted out' and re-embedded within the *real* living room of the home in a mediated phenomenon of shared homely space.

Similarly this valorisation of the 'ordinary' is extended to other talk show programming, whereby the programmes rest on the persona of the presenters such as Kilroy and Vanessa. Although *The Time... The Place* did not headline its presenter John Stapleton in quite the same way, the show's particular emphasis was to move around the UK to different towns for its studio audience. In this way, *The Time... The Place* replicates the here and now of this 'communicative ethos' of broadcasting. In these studio discussion programmes the format is ordinary people talking about their lives, replaying domestic issues through the

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<sup>4</sup> The presenters' lives are also some of the common matter regularly found in the British tabloid press. Richard Madeley's shoplifting charge and Ann Diamond's cot death campaign after the death of her own son, as well as her divorce from her producer- husband, all received extensive coverage in *The Sun*.



control of the host. The hosts appear as 'down-to-earth' and style themselves as 'one of the people' who draw upon common-sense on 'our' behalf.

Although here the television studio is not always set up to reflect the home environment (except for *Vanessa* where guests would often sit on armchairs) the textual conventions still attempt to produce a co-present effect of 'being there'. For instance, at the opening of *Kilroy*, we see the set and rows of participants as though a stage, but once Kilroy-Silk addresses us through direct address, the subjective camera angle then moves with him into the studio audience. We walk up the steps with him and are then positioned within the studio audience space where ordinary people debate. In this way the home and the studio are co-spatially organised together where the viewer at home is encouraged to experience a feeling of co-presence, inhabiting the same space as the studio audience. (I refer more extensively to the staging arrangements of the programmes in Chapter Five of the thesis.) In these programmes therefore, there is a continued relationship whereby televisual reality unfolds in parallel with the everyday lived experience of the viewers. Television allows itself to emerge as though 'live' and co-temporal with daily life. One only has to think of the embedding of temporal rituals like Valentines Day or Christmas Day in the soap opera world which are similarly reproduced in the mid-morning shows.

#### **4.5 Sociability and conversation**

The co-temporal and co-spatial organisation of broadcasting assists in the development of intimate para-social relationships. For Horton and Wohl, this 'illusion' of intimacy is sustained through the regular and ordinary, 'omnipresent' nature of television broadcasting.

The conversational gestures employed by the host/presenter are interpretable as though he or she is talking to friends, not, as in early broadcasts, through a hierarchical position of talking down to the masses. Television's mode of speaking therefore, assumes a relationship of equals. When referring the host they suggest that, "to say that he [or she] is familiar and intimate is to use pale and feeble language for the pervasiveness and closeness with which multitudes feel his [or her] presence" (1956:357). Meyrowitz even argues that, "the evolution of the media has begun to cloud the differences between stranger and friend and to weaken the distinction between people who are 'here' and people who are 'somewhere else'" (1985:122).

Scannell refers to the development of such a relationship as related to 'sociability' which he argues is "the most fundamental characteristic of broadcasting's communicative ethos" (1996: 23) and which is not related to a message or any purposive intention. Other authors refer similarly to an increasing 'personalisation' occurring in TV discourse (Silverstone,1994). The medium of sociability is conversation - talk for talk's sake. Here Scannell takes direction from Simmel: "in sociability talking is an end in itself; in purely sociable conversation the content is merely the indispensable carrier of the stimulation, which the lively exchange of talk as such unfolds"(1950:136). Therefore, conversation provides the means through which we can understand and develop analysis of the sociable relationships formed through the communicative strategies of broadcasting. As Scannell points out:

To describe the communicative manner and style of radio and television as conversational means more than chatty mannerisms and a personalised idiom [...] It means orienting to the normative values of ordinary talk in which participants have equal status and equal discursive rights. (1996:24)

#### **4.6 Analysing conversation - drawing from linguistics**

One of the imperatives of broadcasting's communicative intentionality, is that it assumes some kind of, if not mutual, conversational relationship with the audience at home.

Fairclough (1994) understands this within a wider cultural trend which he refers to as 'the conversationalisation of public discourse' which he argues has a wider ideological drive within consumer culture. This thesis will now take this conversational focus as its topic for analysis in suggesting that analysing the actual language of the text might assist an assessment of its communicative relationship with its audience.

How then does one set about analysing the media in terms of its conversational discourse?

In Chapter One I suggested that we might better understand the relationship of the media with its audiences if we better understood communicative processes at work.

In the next stages of this chapter I outline some of the theoretical implications of researching the relationship between speakers from research into 'discourse'. Some of these findings from linguistic analyses, I suggest, are useful to the analysis of broadcast discourse and present ways of carrying out a more focused analysis of the discursive relationship between conversational text and audience.



#### 4.6.1 Discourse

Earlier, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I suggested that the investigation of speech within cultural studies was marginalised by Saussure's early distinction between *langue* and *parole* which produced a formal, structural approach to the study of language that has dominated twentieth-century linguistics. This approach describes language as a psychological phenomenon, where language acquisition is understood as an in-built mental process.<sup>5</sup> This kind of formalist linguistics describes language in terms of its different units, categories, schematic patterns, or relations (Van-Dijk, 1985) and its structuralist emphasis means that attention is drawn to the way in which different units function in relation to each other. In the dominant paradigm, therefore, the psychological formulation of language codes and grammar are not impacted by social relationships or lived experiences.

Many linguists who operate in contradistinction to this approach utilise a wider conceptual field of language use that refers to *discourse*:

A term used in linguistics to refer to a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence - but, with this broad notion, several different applications may be found. At its most general, a discourse is a behavioural unit which has a pre-theoretical status in linguistics: it is a set of utterances which constitutes a recognisable speech event (no reference being made to its linguistic structuring) e.g. a conversation, a joke, a sermon, an interview. (Crystal, 1985:72)

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<sup>5</sup> That language is a key means to the investigation of the mind as an area of cognitive psychology is most famously associated with the work of Noam Chomsky, especially in Language and Mind (1968).

Thinking about language in terms of discourse moves us closer to the kind of study suggested by Volosinov and Bakhtin, as discussed earlier in this thesis. It takes us beyond the grammar of the sentence into the realm of language as embedded within behavioural practices. As Crystal explains above, 'discourse' enables the interpretation of language use as more than the make-up of its grammatical items but as constitutive of social phenomena, such as a joke or a chat. This is reminiscent of Volosinov's discussion of language as characterised by 'behavioural genres' and thus points us to the analysis of language as lived interaction.

Such approaches to discourse are sometimes identified within a 'functionalist' framework; that is to suggest that language use serves social functions. Brown and Yule point out that, "one of the pervasive illusions which persists in the analysis of language is that we understand the meaning of the linguistic message solely on the basis of the words and the structure of the sentence(s) used to convey that message" (1985:223). One can see here the overlap between theoretical assertions from both linguistics and media studies that emerge from the pursuit of a structuralist analysis - that is the denial of the questions of the *how* of communication as a process. As Scannell (1991a) also points out:

Media and cultural studies in the UK are still dominated by the encoding-decoding model of communications and a model of language based on Saussure. Mapped onto these is a text-reader theory derived from literary studies of written 'texts' to account for the relationships between the product of radio and television and their audiences. (1991a:10)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I will return to the implications of such an assertion in Chapter Six of this thesis.

According to Scannell, therefore, thinking about how the media communicates with its audience involves moving beyond the encoding-decoding paradigm. As well as considering the substance and production of media messages, should we not also pay attention to how that 'substance' is assembled and generated dynamically in actual media 'talk'? How is it that we are addressed by radio and television? Who is it that the media speak to? For Scannell these questions propose a crucial distinction between a structuralist approach to the media and a more dynamic interactive perspective:

Nevertheless, the oneself so addressed by radio and television is a *someone*, not just anyone; that is a person, not a subject as in Althusser's notion of ideological interpellation. (Scannell 1996:13)

According to Scannell, we must start thinking about the ways in which programmes address 'someone' - what he refers to as the 'for anyone-as-someone' structure which he argues "is a necessary precondition of any cultural product that can (a) be found as meaningfully available, without any difficulty, by anyone, and (b) presents itself in such a way that it appears to be 'for me'"(1991:14). To interrogate this relationship we must therefore consider his notion of 'communicative intentionality'. This leads us to a focus on approaches to 'discourse', which seek to emphasise the import of context, situation and the identity of speakers as defining the *communicative* function of language.

However, adopting approaches to discourse is not entirely unproblematic. As Schiffrin stresses, "discourse analysis still remains a vast and somewhat vague subfield of linguistics" (1994:viii). In this context, the field of discourse analysis presents an unhelpful diversity of analytic approaches, since Fasold remarks that, "in a sense the study of



discourse is the study of *any* aspect of language"(1990:65). In the next section, therefore, I will draw out some of the approaches to discourse which might be advantageous to this particular social context of broadcasting. That is, to the double articulation of broadcasting as both stemming from an institutional context and its reception within the everyday environment of the home. This will help to explain some of the tools borrowed for my subsequent analysis of the media as a communicative experience. I would suggest that there are three dominant areas of discourse analysis which provide ways of defining the functions of language in interaction and in obvious ways each strand builds upon the foundations of another - speech act theory, pragmatics and conversation analysis. They are all concerned with the overarching principles through which we communicate and make sense of each others' meaning. Crucially, they give us a sense of how language functions beyond the grammar of the sentence, in the interactive strategies involved in the exchanges between speakers.

#### **4.6.2 Speech act theory**

The origin of **speech act theory** is attributed to J.L. Austin, most notably through his 1963 work, *How To Do Things With Words*, the title of which betrays its concern with functional elements of language use. Austin's basic tenet is that often in exchanges we say things which may not directly carry factual information but instead work to perform a communicative function. Thus he distinguishes between what he calls 'constatives' - statements that have a truth value - and 'performatives' - statements which do not report anything but which perform an action. For instance, the statement 'I name this ship' performs the action of 'naming'. In this way, Austin begins to explain the difference

between understanding grammatically produced sentences and understanding spoken utterances. Utterances often perform a communicative function which he defines as 'speech acts'.

For Austin, speech acts are comprised of three elements: a 'locutionary act', the sounds and words of a constative meaning; an 'illocutionary act', the issuing of an utterance which constitutes the performative function of how it is being said; and finally a 'perlocutionary act' which refers to the effect of the act on the hearer. Austin therefore opens up some basic ways of seeing the *communicative* elements at play within utterances. He breaks open the concept of speech as simply the transmission of information and provides a social, functional understanding that has been conventionally marginalised by traditional linguistics' understanding of speech as 'parole'. Austin's initial suggestions were taken further and provided the impetus for John Searle's (1969) *Speech Acts*.

Searle builds upon Austin's suggestions of the functional principles of language use. He too insists on the importance of understanding speech as *acts* to the development of a theory of language as communication by insisting that, "the speech act is the basic unit of communication" (1969:21).<sup>7</sup> Searle suggests that speech acts are part of linguistic *competence* - that is that we learn the rules of communication and develop a competence in employing the rules according to varying situations. Thus he produces a taxonomy of illocutionary acts. These are five basic kinds of action that one can perform when speaking: representatives (e.g. asserting), directives (e.g. requesting), commissives (e.g. promising), expressives (e.g. thanking) and declaratives (e.g. appointing). As speakers we are able to

hearers we are able to identify those acts and their achievement in the communicative context. Communication therefore rests upon this shared knowledge of *intentions* between speakers.

An example of where speech act theory has been useful to the analysis of broadcast discourse is in Montgomery's (1986b) paper on 'DJ Talk'. Here he describes the way in which co-presence is implied in the discourse through the use of 'response-demanding' utterances in the talk of DJs, such as:

... how's Virgo doing?...

...what's the gossip today?...

...have you noticed the penny for the guy things are starting to appear?...

...can you see that?...

...stop that it s dirty...

...listen...

...but here hang on... (1986b:429)

Here we can see that these utterances are meaningful in that they perform actions, 'illocutionary acts', which are specific to the context of radio's articulation to absent others. These devices help establish a relationship between the DJ and the absent listeners and thus have a 'perlocutionary effect'.

Speech act theory, therefore, is a useful place to identify communicative intentions within speech as *acts*. It takes us beyond a Saussurian notion of *parole* as simply the spoken

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Schiffrin (1994).



Speech act theory, therefore, is a useful place to identify communicative intentions within speech as *acts*. It takes us beyond a Saussurian notion of *parole* as simply the spoken reflection of the language structure and develops an understanding of communicative competencies as knowledges, learned from social interaction and not from language as a system. The schema, however, does have its limitations. Whilst on the one hand it does acknowledge a mutual understanding between speaker and hearer (or in the case of radio, 'listener'), it does not provide a method for understanding the way in which speakers produce dialogue (Schiffrin, 1994). It does not take us far enough into grasping communication as *interaction*. The study of **pragmatics** however, offers a more developed model of co-operation between speakers and hearers.

#### 4.6.3 Pragmatics

**Pragmatics** takes its direction from the work of H.P. Grice. In his paper 'Meaning' (1957) Grice, like Austin, makes a distinction between what is said and what is meant. He refers to statements as either 'natural' - devoid of human intention - or 'non-natural' - containing some intentional implied communication feature which should be interpreted in a particular way.<sup>8</sup> In his later paper 'Logic and Conversation' (1975), Grice develops the concept of 'implicature', which Levinson (1983) describes as an "example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanations of linguistic phenomena" (1983:97). In Gricean terms, 'implicature' refers to the speaker's intention which is inscribed not only in the semantic meaning within the utterance but also in the use of conversational principles. Grice provides us with four

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<sup>8</sup> According to Scannell (1996) Grice's theory of communicative intentionality is useful to the analysis of broadcasting since it helps distinguish between utterance and meaning. Scannell describes the way in which we often know what is meant even when we are not explicitly told. In broadcasting a good deal of background

maxims for conversation that make up what he refers to as the 'co-operative principle' (1975):

- i. Maxim of quality - make sure your contribution is true. Do not say what you believe to be false or what you have little evidence for.
- ii. Maxim of quantity - make sure your contribution is as informative as required for the exchange. Do not make your contributions more informative than required.
- iii. Maxim of relevance - make sure that your contribution is relevant to the exchange.
- iv. Maxim of manner - be perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, be brief and orderly.<sup>9</sup>

Utilising these maxims (and sometimes manipulating them) allows speakers to lead hearers to interpret their communicative intentions in ways that reach beyond the logical meanings of what they say. Pragmatics therefore leads us to the fundamental assertion that conversation relies on the principle of *co-operation* rather than on the principle of language per se.

Harris' (1991) essay on politicians' responses in broadcast interviews, shows how politicians often evade answering direct questions. One of the strategies that they employ is shifting the agenda - thereby breaching the maxim of relevance - and another is by over-elaborating upon the issue - thereby breaching the maxims of quantity and manner. Such strategies must be understood within the historical development of the place broadcast

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knowledge is assumed (consider the serial specific knowledge of the soap opera) which is part of the relationship built between broadcasting and its audiences.

political interviews now occupy in the public sphere. These interactive forms are brought about by the mediation of journalistic inquiry for the audience whereby 'answering the question' has become crucial to public opinion.

According to Schiffrin (1994) both speech act theory and pragmatics provide us with philosophical accounts of principles of spoken discourse but when applied to actual discursive interactions require some adaptation. In *Pragmatics* (1983), Levinson acknowledges a debt to speech act theory and pragmatics in the comprehension of the transference of meaning but recognises that these ideas still do not give us a full picture of the operation of conversation as dialogue. Levinson therefore suggests that one also has to take into account the contribution to understanding discourse made by **conversation analysis (CA)**. Levinson combines a pragmatic approach with one from CA which demonstrates the way in which meaning in utterances is related to their position within the sequential organisation of the interaction. This illustrates the inter-related nature of these paradigms which are separated out here in the interest of clarity.

#### **4.6.4 Conversation analysis (CA)**

**Conversation analysis** has its roots within sociology, more particularly within the intellectual movement known as ethnomethodology, which developed in America in the 1970s. It grew in reaction to the perceived deductive tendency embedded within mainstream quantitative techniques of sociological research. Therefore, rather than analysing macro-structures which determine the social order at large, ethnomethodology engages with the micro-politics of social interaction. It attempts to understand how people

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<sup>9</sup> Summarised from Levinson (1983).



experience and make sense of their everyday experiences, placing the mundane at the centre of academic inquiry and is mostly associated with the work of Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel.

Within this wider field of investigating the fabric of everyday life the discipline of conversation analysis provides us with a method of discussing interaction which could provide a framework for analysing that simulacrum of 'conversational give and take' (Horton and Wohl, 1956) outlined earlier in this chapter. Conversation analysis moves closer to a theorisation of lived interaction since its theoretical assumptions rely upon data collected from the tape-recording of naturally occurring conversation, unlike the other approaches to discourse outlined above. Exponents of CA approach the study of conversation "as a rich source of observable material on how members of society achieve orderliness in their everyday interactions with each other" (Montgomery, 1986a:51). Here conversation is understood as a vital source in comprehending our sense of social order. Its analysis draws our attention to the way in which language both creates *and is created by* social context (Schiffrin, 1994, my emphasis).

The most significant contribution, which formed the basis for much subsequent work in CA, is the 'turn-taking system' proposed by Sacks, Scheggloff and Jefferson (1974). In this the authors explicate a system through which conversation appears to take place in an orderly manner. They are distrusting of general theoretical abstractions but want to "handle the details of actual events, handle them formally" (Sacks, 1984:26). Accordingly, they identify a model through which turn-taking in conversation takes place smoothly: speakers

change, mostly one party talks at a time, exchanges of turn occur without gaps or overlaps and there are also 'turn allocation techniques' whereby the present speaker can allocate the next speaker, or the next speaker can self select. What is remarkable about this system is that there is no pre-planning of these moves before the conversation takes place.

Conversational turn-taking is part of our communicative competence. In this schema, operating outside the normal conversational rules, for instance unduly interrupting a speaker, is seen as a violation of conversational practice. Other research within the CA approach includes systems for the opening and closing of conversation, usually through 'adjacency pairs' which helps to explain a stimulus-response sequence in situations such as leave-taking, greeting or changing topics.

I do not intend to provide an exhaustive account of all developments within the CA paradigm here, I simply want to present CA's usefulness for identifying rules and sequencing within interaction which cannot be found elsewhere. Again, however, some critics suggest that there are limitations to this approach. Its concentration on the transcribed text, albeit naturally occurring speech, can remove the articulations from the speakers themselves. According to Fasold, "it treats the people involved in the conversation as secondary to the fact that a structured event is in progress" (1990:64). Early CA analysis pays little attention to the social identities of speakers, to the social context in which conversation occurs and hence to any structural inequalities between speakers. Its concentration on the structure of interaction seeks mainly to expose general rules from transcribed texts. Schifffrin (1994) suggests that the reluctance to understand texts as

embedded within specific social dimensions may be due to CA's insistence on avoiding premature generalisations.

This may have been true of early research in CA which set out to develop a set of generic principles that could be applied to everyday interaction, but more recently there has been a sustained concern with the context-bound nature of interaction. Hutchby and Wooffitt's (1998) textbook on the field of conversation analysis outlines this development within the CA field. They refer to contemporary CA as the study of the "interactional organisation of social activities" (1998:14) and suggest that some of the key questions raised by conversation analysis "arise more from a sociological than a linguistic basis" (1998:23). Also, Montgomery lucidly describes this bridging of CA between linguistic and sociological imperatives. He suggests "conversation analysis is more concerned with verbal interaction as instances of the situated social order" (1986a:51). Thus, CA has developed into an approach which recognises the importance of context. In Boden and Zimmerman (1991) we see the effect of CA branching out into institutional exchanges within role-based activities - e.g. doctor-patient exchanges, the courtroom, job interview, the classroom and broadcasting. Here the CA perspective treats the interaction as both context shaped and context renewing.

Researchers have often adopted CA's approach to the turn-taking structure and applied it to the specificity of the broadcast context, taking into account the nature of the production of talk for the viewer at home. For example, Heritage (1985) shows how the absence of a



'third-turn receipt'<sup>10</sup> in question and answer sequences in the broadcast news is predicated upon the production of the talk for the overhearing audience. Also, the interviewer adapts the usual conventions of everyday conversation to formulate information for the viewers at home. Following Heritage, much of this pioneering work into CA analysis of the broadcast text has been concerned with the structural organisation of the news interview (Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991 and Clayman, 1991), concerned with specific turn-type pre-allocations which are contextually unique to the broadcast encounter.

Fairclough (1992) is critical of conversation analysis for privileging of the 'turn-taking' system as the fundamental matrix that organises interaction. He argues that conversation analysis presents a generalised model of interaction which ignores the fact that social, cultural and power relational factors affect the talk exchanged between speakers. More recently, Hutchby (1996) has provided an analysis of power relational factors in radio call-ins. His CA analysis of the discourse produced between radio host and caller emphasises the asymmetry between their contributions in the formation of the discourse. The host ultimately is in an institutionally validated position of power which is located in the turn-taking structure of the phone-in and illustrated in the host's manipulation of the discourse and pursuit of conflict and argument. Some callers are more adept than others at usurping this power through their conversational strategies such as interruptions etc., but ultimately the host retains control through the interaction.

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<sup>10</sup> The 'third turn receipt' is used in everyday question and answer sequences in face-to-face conversations.

## 4.7 Broadcast talk

There is a growing trend of research concerned with the analysis of broadcasting in terms of the communicative functions embedded within its discourse. This is different from the simultaneous growth of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989; 1992; 1995 and Kress and Hodge, 1979) which provides a method of analysing the ideological formation of language structures within all forms of the media but has mostly concentrated on written, rather than spoken, text. Conversation analysts, on the other hand, concerned with broadcast talk focus on the institutional character of the formation of the discursive features of the televised text:

If some interaction has an institutional character then the relevance of the institutional context in question must be shown to inhabit the details of the participants' conduct. (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991:94)

Studying the talk of television and radio has received increased attention in recent years.<sup>11</sup> Despite the dominant tradition of media studies having neglected a rigorous consideration of 'talk' as imperative to understanding television and radio's relationship with their audiences, Corner's (1999) recent textbook, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, includes a chapter on 'Talk' as one of the key forms of television's protean nature. He thus highlights the realm of talk as fundamental for television studies because, "talk thus generates the socio-communicative sphere within which television images operate" (1999:37).

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<sup>11</sup> This is indicated by Scannell's (1991b) edited collection Broadcast Talk.

This returns us to the observations made by Scannell, about television's search for a voice that can be reconciled with the nature of broadcasting's domestic consumption. It is here that discourse analysis can engage with the import of context, since it is the duality of broadcast discourse - its production within the public domain and its reception within the private domain of the home - which provides us with its 'double articulation'. It is its institutional production and domestic consumption which makes broadcast discourse a remarkable phenomenon.

The tradition concerned with broadcast talk has therefore begun to establish some key features of this talk phenomenon. Here I will detail some of the main characteristics which are relevant to my own analysis of morning talk programming.

#### **4.7.1 Double articulation**

Broadcast talk is not merely conversation, but it is conversation produced for an overhearing audience. As we have already seen, 'normal' conversational maxims are transformed by the mediation of talk. For instance, Montgomery (1999) discusses the way in which elements of 'performance' are central to understanding the discursive structure of *The Mrs Merton Show* as entertainment. Here talk is produced for comedic effect and audience response mainly through transgressing usual conversational maxims. For instance, Mrs Merton uses ritual insults which breach the "approbation maxim" which Leech tells us "says 'avoid saying unpleasant things about others, and more particularly, about *H*, (the hearer)'" (Leech, 1983:135). Comedy for the listener at home is created through the discursive undermining of the hearer in the studio - the guest on the show. This



question Grice's maxim of 'manner' in the production of double-entendres etc.  
(Montgomery, 1999).

This element of 'performance' is what transforms the discourse from ordinary conversation through the necessary 'double articulation' of broadcasting's entertainment bias.

#### 4.7.2 Deixis

'Deixis' refers to, "features of language that refer directly to the personal, temporal, or locational characteristics of a situation [...] (e.g. you, now, here.)" (Crystal, 1995:451).

According to Hanks, the optimal condition for the use of deixis is where both participants, "are face to face, mutually oriented, and share detailed background knowledge of referents" (Hanks, 1989:112).<sup>12</sup> One of the key features of much broadcast discourse is that the talk itself uses discursive references that are usually considered to require face-to-face arrangements to be meaningful.

Thus, in Montgomery's (1986b) discussion of 'DJ Talk', social deixis is created through the use of direct address, 'you', to address the listener. This deixis can be narrowed down by the use of accompanying identifiers, whereby the 'you' may be identified by name:

Alison and Liz you are now official listeners for Ward Eighteen

Ian Schlessor hello happy birthday to you

You are now (Marjorie) the official Radio One listener for Princess Street

Yeh Okay then Bob Sproat in er Worcestershire er... T-shirt on the way to you.'

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Marriott (1997).

You are now (Marjorie) the official Radio One listener for Princess Street  
Yeh Okay then Bob Sproat in er Worcestershire er... T-shirt on the way to you.'  
(Montgomery, 1986b:425)

Through these deictic references, absent viewers are treated as though they are capable of responding, thus suggesting co-presence. Social deixis can also be extended to include spatial deixis through references to the environment of the speaker, such as:

'er got my pumpkin in the studio here  
I(t)s really good (I) got a real pumpkin honestly  
I mean you probably think that I'm ninety  
but here hang on  
let me just hold this up in front of the microphone  
so you can see my pumpkin  
can you see that  
a real Halloween pumpkin  
(Montgomery, 1986b:429)

The references to the immediate environment of the speaker (*this* place, pumpkin *here*, can you see *that*) according to Montgomery, "can be understood as a device for erasing a sense of distance between speaker and audience - assuming a common visual field thereby implies a form of co-presence" (op.cit:429).

Similarly, for this thesis, the co-temporal arrangements of television are interesting since in some sense television is often 'live', unlike film, as it is immediate, "transmitted and

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Marriott (1997).

received in the same moment as it is produced" (Ellis,1982:132). Therefore, much of TV, despite the dislocated spatial arrangements of the viewer, refers to a shared 'now' of co-temporality. Marriott (1996) for example, discusses the way in which this phenomenological 'now' is complicated by the shifting of tenses in sports replay talk, where she concludes that the replay:

re-embeds the sequence in a different 'here' and 'now - the 'here' of the viewer and the 'now' of the television event, unfolding in real shared time. The development of replay technology means that the same sequence can be re-embedded again and again, each time in a different phenomenological 'now'. (1995:84)

Deictic references to time and 'now' are also therefore interesting to the understanding of broadcast talk.

### 4.7.3 Footing

The concept of 'footing' was developed by Erving Goffman (1981). It is premised on Goffman's earlier work in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1969) where he explains the constructed nature of identity through the various ways in which self is performed or presented in response to situated environments and present others.<sup>13</sup> In the concept of 'footing', Goffman is concerned to dissolve the unitary categories of speaker and hearer since they are too oversimplified and do not recognise the parts other bystanders or eavesdroppers might play in the in the interaction. For Goffman there are various forms

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that Goffman has long been considering everyday practices as 'performances' before the current vogue in post-structuralist thought to use the concept of 'performance' as a shift away from fixity (see Chapter Two). In an interview for *Radical Philosophy*, Judith Butler acknowledges her debt to John Searle's *Speech Acts* for the notion of 'performativity'.



and degrees of participation which can be broken down into more specific interactional 'footings'. These are the 'animator' - the person who utters the sequence of words; the 'author' - the person with whom the sentiments originated; and the 'principal' - the person whose position is being expressed in and through the utterance (1981:144). An individual may therefore switch between these alignments depending upon the presentation of self in particular contexts.

This concept becomes useful in broadcast talk. For instance, Brand and Scannell (1991) describe the way in which a DJ - in this case Tony Blackburn - can switch footings depending upon his 'performance'. Blackburn thematizes himself in a number of self-conscious ways which involves the use of different voices: authoritative, emphathetic, camp or send-up (1991:210). He can play a variety of different roles embedded within short segments of dialogue. Similarly, Clayman (1992) utilises the concept of footing to demonstrate how news interviewers can preserve their institutionally prescribed neutrality. By shifting footing interviewers can remove the inference of themselves as 'author', either by attributing the viewpoint to a different 'principal' e.g. "Doctor Yallow said earlier..." (1992:168) or to a generic unknown principle, e.g. "It is said that..." (op.cit.:169). Clayman is keen to point out that this use of footing is context-sensitive and it points to the ways in which interactional concepts can be applied to the phenomenon of broadcast discourse.

#### **4.7.4 Genre**

Tolson argues for the consideration of genre in the analysis of broadcasting's discursive products. Drawing upon the work done in discourse analysis, he argues that, "genre is at

once an analytical concept, requiring formal demonstration; but it is also operational, at a level of practical knowledge of which speakers themselves may be more or less aware" (1991:178). The concept of genre is crucial to the understanding of discourse. As Volosinov and Bakhtin discuss 'behavioural genres' that are applicable in the specifics of daily repertoires, so too media analysts can be concerned with the specifics of genre to the patterns of media production. What will emerge through this thesis is a fusing of these ways of thinking - of the genres of lived interaction with the genres of the media's production.

Referencing Halliday, Tolson suggests that discursive genres are located at the point where 'texts' meet social situations, "there is a generic structure in all discourse, including the most informal, spontaneous conversation"(Halliday,1978:134).<sup>14</sup> For Tolson, therefore, one might begin to understand the discursive features of broadcast talk in terms of their generic conventions:

I want to suggest that just as television, and broadcasting more generally, has developed its own particular dramatic genres (e.g. situation comedy), so too it has developed certain forms of broadcast talk which have identifiable generic structures. (1991:179)

Arguing for an approach to speech 'genres' in broadcast discourse, Tolson discusses the formulation of 'chat'. One of the features that he suggests enables us to distinguish 'chat' in the context of the news interview, is that it is "apparent in a clear shift of *register* within the programme format where it occurs, such that the primary business of the format is

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Tolson 1991: 179.



temporarily delayed or suspended" (1991:179).<sup>15</sup> We can identify these shifts in register in three ways: a topic shift to the personal (as opposed to institutional) or towards the private (as opposed to the public), the appropriation of wit, humour, double entendres etc.; and the possibility of 'chat' opening up areas of transgression (e.g. in interviews where the interviewee might be asking questions.)

#### 4.7.5 Forms of sociability

Tolson's arguments remind us that broadcasting's search for a voice led to the development of less formal, more 'sociable' (Scannell, 1996) speech styles across multiple genres which facilitate a closing of the distance between performers and their audiences.<sup>16</sup> Scannell's (1996) discussion suggests an undifferentiated 'sociability' that is generic to the historical development of broadcasting's modes of address. However, I would suggest that it is necessary to complicate this reference to 'sociability' further.

Scannell's examples refer to programmes that were broadcast between the 1930s and the 1960s: *Harry Hopeful* (1935-6), *Billy Welcome* (1941-42) and *Have a Go!* (1946-67).

These are examples of sociability within a particular regional, working-class and masculine framework, indeed Scannell discusses Wilfred Pickles' performance as working-class northerner as crucial to the communicative intention of *Have A Go!*. What this indicates is that modes of address can indeed have a cultural specificity. The 'for-anyone-as-someone structure' can suggest a socially constituted subjectivity. In contemporary broadcasting, for instance, we might consider the particular address implied in 'youth TV' or children's TV.

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<sup>15</sup> 'Register' is a term provided by Halliday (1978) which is used in stylistics to refer to a 'socially defined variety of language, such as scientific or legal English' (Crystal, D 1995:457).



Indeed the time-span of Scannell's examples is crucial to his analysis. As Corner (1993) points out in his account of British television's development of a new 'sociable' communicative forms in the 1950s, these modes of address were unmistakably masculine, whereas radio had a clearer sense of woman as consumer:

Television's newly familiar mediations were still predominantly male and middle class however, and though certain programme genres (and advertising too) had developed distinctive and new styles of gendered address, daytime transmission schedules did not yet have the space to court, and in particular to construct, a 'housewife' audience in the way that had become central to radio. (1993:13)

I would argue that 'sociability' can be genre-specific and that, given the detailed evidence of the gendered nature of many generic forms in broadcasting, that it can also be gendered.

As we saw in Chapter Three, historically, in the 1950s, US daytime television emerged as a specific site to engage the housewife, copying the form of radio programming (Spigel, 1992). However, it was not until the 1980s that the British daytime schedule developed a clear sense of what Spigel calls 'Mrs. Daytime Consumer'. It seems that since the development of morning television in the eighties British networks now have a well-defined strategy of a gendered address that constructs a sense of its audience, possibly more clearly here than in any other time-span on the schedule. Therefore, I intend to analyse how this gendered address is formulated as a generic structure.

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<sup>16</sup> See section 4.3 of this chapter.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some conceptual tools through which we might be able to draw together a textual analysis which takes *communication* as its premise. This draws from suggestions about the phenomenology of broadcasting in the modern age as well as from various discourse analyses into the nature of interaction. This is a significant development in media research away from following the traditional trajectory in media studies which has its roots in structuralism and is concerned with the 'encoding' of meaning. That is not to say that uncovering communicative strategies will not allow us *any* exploration of meaning, rather it suggests that we might be able to recover new possibilities for intervening in media debates if we consider the *how* of broadcasting through a focus on its interactive features. Therefore, I have shown how research into broadcast talk can offer alternative ways of addressing the communicative functions of broadcasting and in this case the modes of address that I intend to discuss as specifically gendered in the example of morning talk programmes.

## Chapter Five

### Analysis of Morning Talk

#### Introduction

In the last chapter I drew together themes from media theory and sociological explorations of linguistics to find new ways of thinking about the text as a 'communicative event', rather than simply in terms of the encoding of messages. In this chapter, I will apply these principles to the TV magazine programmes and talk shows in this study. It is my intention here to analyse the way in which the domestic climate of daytime television structures its 'chat' through para-social arrangements for the daytime audience. There is no doubt that one of the distinctive features of mid-morning television is the spontaneity implied in its reproduction of a televised 'everyday'. This 'everyday' discourse provides an interface between public and private domains which Meyrowitz (1985) suggests may have interesting repercussions for an understanding of gender in the modern age. Whilst the conventions of daytime television approximate natural, mundane conversation both in form and content, one must also think about the way in which the form is institutionally produced and performed.

In this chapter I provide an analysis of the morning magazine programmes *This Morning* and *Good Morning* and then move on to discuss the audience participation programmes *Kilroy*, *The Time...The Place* and *Vanessa*. The programmes are all taken from 1996-1998 and are the programmes that I watched with the women involved in the audience research of the study. This is to assist an image of the communicative process, from broadcast to



reception. There are obvious differences in style and format between the programmes, but I conclude the chapter by drawing together the fundamental common themes or 'orientations' that I suggest underpin their appeals to their audience.

### **5.1 *This Morning* and *Good Morning* - morning magazine programmes**

As I discussed in Chapter Three, these programmes reproduce the everyday through their concentration on domestic issues within a cosy climate of sofas and chat. *This Morning* and *Good Morning* ran for two hours every morning on ITV and BBC1<sup>1</sup> during the period of this study, made up of magazine type 'features' which means that each segment has a different content - including some recorded segments such as short films on travel or cooking etc.. Therefore over five days each week with at least ten segments each day, the content of the programme is a constellation of different parts, constantly shifting through the week. However, these are all linked together with live presentation which joins recorded segments, live interviews, live make-overs, live cookery sections, live phone-ins and live music at the end. Much of the continuity of the programme is therefore provided by the emphasis on the 'liveness' of the show in progress and the spontaneity of the presenters' performances.

#### **5.1.1 Addressing 'Mrs Daytime-Consumer'**

The content of magazine programmes represent obvious ways in which the texts' appeals have a gendered focus. Its staple daily content reflects typically socially constructed feminine pursuits such as cookery, visits from soap opera stars, hair and beauty sections,

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<sup>1</sup> That is until the BBC axed *Good Morning*, after what the press describes as the 'sofa wars'. *This Morning* had consistently high ratings and is still on air.

consumer product advice as well phone-ins on health, relationships and psychological issues. These domestic pursuits are reinforced by the regular hosts - on *This Morning*, the husband and wife team Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan, and on *Good Morning*, Nick Owen and Ann Diamond - along with other regular presenters - a resident agony aunt, doctors, psychologists, hairdressers, make-up artists and chefs. The segments on one day of *This Morning* and *Good Morning* looked like this:

[ <i>This Morning</i> 7/6/98]	[ <i>Good Morning</i> 25/1/96]
Hunky DIY men	Mum inspired to stop smoking by her daughter
Dr. Ruth's sex clinic	Appeal to stop sanctions in Iraq
Nicky Clarke's hair make-over	Smart appearance - dressing for work
Interview with Linford Christie	Interview with Simon Williams
Riviera Café with Andre Surman	Scotch Broth
Interview with Richard Powell	Married to the job
Nancy Lamb's Singaporean Cooking	Ceilidh dancing
Interview with soap star who plays a trans-sexual	Interview with mother and daughter who were propositioned by a Turkish waiter.
Singer - Kerri-Ann. <sup>2</sup>	

However, in terms of its sociability, how does the magazine programme's conversational style imply a gendered audience? In other words, I need to address its 'for anyone-as-someone structure' (Scannell,1996, 2000) as explicitly gendered. As Scannell points out, "the radio [or television] must speak to a listener as someone in particular, with the attributes (the face needs) of a person" (1996:24).

Possibly the most obvious way in which this is achieved in the magazine programme is through the extensive use of direct address. All segments are linked together with direct address, looking straight to camera, which reaffirm the viewer as primary addressee rather than an overhearer.<sup>3</sup> Much of the discursive approach in the magazine programme replicates what Montgomery (1986b) finds in DJ talk. He describes DJ talk as a discourse which is:

obsessively concerned with its own conditions of production and consumption. It tends to foreground the relationship of the DJ to the talk, and the relationship of the talk to the audience, rather than the relationship of the talk to 'the world at large'. Unlike news programmes, for example (where the role of the newscaster in particular and the broadcasting institution in general is often elided from the discourse so that its preferred mode is third person, past tense, with little direct reference to the audience), DJ talk operates much more frequently along the axis between first and second person, between *I* and *you*. (Montgomery, 1986b:424).<sup>4</sup>

As I pointed out in Chapter Four, Montgomery suggests that in DJ talk the use of direct address is part of establishing a social-relational dimension of talk which usually exists in co-present face-to-face communication. In many ways the magazine programme is reminiscent of a radio show most noticeably because direct address exists throughout the text. Consider the opening of this edition of *This Morning*<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> The segments are not each discrete units, during the programme we go back to many segments for progress reports.

<sup>3</sup> This distinction between primary addressee and overhearer which I discussed in Chapter Four, becomes crucial at later stages in this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Montgomery (1986) notes that traditional research in the field of language and ideology has been more concerned with third person discourse, that is not with discourse that has been primarily concerned with its interaction with its audience.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1 for transcription conventions.



[Show opens with men doing DIY to the *This Morning* theme music.]

1. Richard: What's with the nipple [tape?

2. Judy: [ye:s heh, heh, heh

3 Richard: what's with the nipple tape

4 Judy: He's just very sensitive (.) [it certainly will be when he takes it off.

5. Richard: [what about when he takes it off, my gom

6. Judy: Erm the- that's it's actually happening, that was live up on the roof, right now, the men  
7 nominated by you loving wives, girlfriends and mums as the sexiest handymen in  
8 Britain. Which of all that lot will be going through to our finals? You can find out in just  
9 a couple of minutes plus Olympic gold medallist Linford Christie on his latest victory in  
10 the courtroom. He'll be talking about the allegations made by former convict John  
11 McVicar that he took drugs to enhance his performance and despite winning he does  
12 face legal bills of up to a quarter of a million pounds.

13 Richard: So that's Li::nford Christie live on the show and she's b↑ack after her first appearance  
14 on the show five years ago. Doctor Ruth oh:: yes she'll be taking your calls on the  
15 phone-in on sex problems and you kno:w what she's like so you can ask what you like  
16 you don't have to use your real name as usual on those phone-ins (.) Another tiny bundle  
17 of energ- energy rather in the studio over there is Nancy Lamb cooking up Singaporean  
18 food [shouts across studio] Hi Nancy [shot of Nancy waving] mad as ever and ↑WOO  
19 HOO win a holiday for two in Jamaica keep watching this screen for details and there's  
20 more its a:ll changed down in Weatherfield Britain's first ever soap transsexual Hayley  
21 joins us live.

22 Judy: Nicky Clarke making dreams come true in today's hair clinic the styles you always  
23 wanted ten forty. [montage shots of Nicky doing various women's hair]

24 Richard: Robert Powell and it was meant to be Colin Baker talking about their new play but  
25 Colin's got lost

26 Judy: but Robert's here er that's hot on the footsteps of The Corrs, Boyzone and Bewitched,  
Ireland's latest export Kerri Ann she's with us live at ten past twelve.

[7/7/98]

The first most obvious thing to note is that we enter Richard and Judy's conversation as though we are eavesdropping, interrupting them chatting to each other. Then at line 6 there is a shift as Judy turns to directly address the camera. The rest of the introduction contains many references to 'you' which are suggestive of some kind of a reciprocal relationship as they are also usually accompanied by inferences to viewers perceived actions: 'you can find out in just a couple of minutes', 'you can ask what you like', 'keep watching' etc.. Montgomery labels these 'response-demanding' utterances which are more usually prevalent in co-present communication.

Montgomery's (1986b) analysis of DJ talk refers to DJs addressing their audience by the use of 'identifiers' such as star signs, people on the way to work or from a particular region. However, in keeping with *This Morning's* suggestion of reciprocity, identifying viewers is done in such a way that it is usually linked to the appeal for people to take part in the phone-in and asks viewers to identify themselves in terms of a particular issue. In this case it is related to the 'sex clinic':

1. Judy: That's our phone-in with Doctor Ruth, if your sex life is er not working out and you can't  
2 get no satisfac- [ (.) oh god no I'm sorry about that

Richard: [No, no don't do it

4 Judy: Give us a call on the usual number.

[7/7/98]

In this case we are asked to identify a problem in our sex lives to take part in the actual programme's phone-in and 'Ruth here will put a smile on your face'. In fact, appeals to the viewer to identify themselves in relation to the daily phone-in topic, are constantly reiterated throughout the early parts of the programmes:

1. Richard: ...and if you're desperate for a baby and one of you is infertile then do:: ring one of
- 2 Britain's best experts in the field he could have very good news for you. That's the
- 3 number [number comes up on the screen] o, three, four, five double five, one thousand
- 4 and we'll see you in eight minutes...

[18/1/96]

And again later in the same programme:

1. Judy: ...and if you're infertile and you're desperate for a baby then keep ringin' on o three, four
- 2 five, double five one thousand, for a live consultation with one of Britain's top specialists
- 3 in the field...

[18/1/96]

On *Good Morning* the phone-ins can be about less sensitive issues such as:

1. Nick: ...and if you're always playing with your plumbing, straightening your shelves and fixing
- 2 fuses, just like me::: today's phone-in is for you....

[25/1/96]



*Good Morning* provided further opportunities throughout the programme for viewers to call about different topics. It would request viewers to 'call in with what you would most miss if you lived abroad' or 'call in and tell us your embarrassing stories' - the content of these calls would then be recorded and read out by Ann or Nick throughout the course of the show, much like a radio talk programme. In *This Morning* the reiteration of the phone-in topic, to ensure that there are enough callers for the slot, often means that they suggest a number of 'identifiers' through which members of the audience may feel themselves personally addressed. For example:

[Link from talking to Raj, the psychiatrist, about relationships with differences]

1. Richard: Okay, well thanks for now Raj and erm (.) [direct address to camera - close-up] if
- 2 you are at logger heads over any issue with your partner, whether it's religion,
- 3 politics, sex or morality, give us a ca:ll .hh on o one five one treble five one thousand
- 4 and Raj will try and sort (.) you and your relationship out- maybe you can't agree
- 5 about how to bring up the kids as he said .hh maybe you're being forced to submit to
- 6 your partners beliefs or (.) per↑haps you've both made a compromise and it's all
- 7 worked out. Do::: let us know...

[30/6/97]

In both programmes, it is clear that the discourse of the programme assumes a kind of spatial deixis and co-presence which is predicated on the invitation of interpersonal relationship with the viewers. There is a constant invitation to participate which I would argue makes these texts interesting in terms of para-social interaction.

However, whilst Scannell and Montgomery imply a kind of generic sociable address, it is crucial that in these programmes there are obvious ways in which the invitation is also, explicitly, gendered. The programmes assume a community of women in much the same way that women's magazines have been described as postulating a 'synthetic sisterhood' (Talbot, 1995). In the opening to *This Morning* consider the way in which Judy refers to the nominations of sexiest handymen by 'you loving wives, girlfriends and mums' (line 7), assuming an audience made up of women belonging to traditional heterosexual relationships. Most of the phone-ins, especially on *This Morning* refer to 'personal' issues which usually belong to the feminised private sphere - infertility, sex advice. These inferences show how the communicative ethos of broadcasting also helps reinforce traditional social relationships - what Probyn (1990) might call 'new traditionalism'. Later in the extract of the opening of *This Morning* consider that Judy's description of Nicky Clarke the hairdresser 'making dreams come true' with 'the styles you've always wanted', is visually accompanied by shots of Nicky curling and combing various women's hair.

These observations may seem rather banal, but what is important here is that the direct address in terms of Scannell's 'for anyone-as-someone' structure is in this case unmistakably feminine. This sociable style also consistently invites reciprocity, in terms of a communicative exchange as though we are co-present which is carried through its sense of sociability in a simulation of mutual friendship, through a style that is possibly akin to gossip - were there any stable definition of that form.

### 5.1.2 The breakdown of the text as spectacle

One of the ways in which *This Morning* and *Good Morning* establish sociable relationships with their audiences is by utilising strategies which serve to close the distance between text and spectator. This includes constant reminders of the live text as 'in progress', a text that the audience are privileged to be seeing in its making. It does not appear as a polished, complete text, artfully produced and screened for us, rather it evolves in front of us as we are made to feel part of its production.

For instance, errors help constitute some of the programme's spontaneous appeal. The presenters Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan do not excuse or feel embarrassed about being unsure about what happens next or making an error. It is simply part of the appeal of the 'liveness' and spontaneity going on *now* 'this morning':

- 1 Richard: ...Right, are we gonna move on then?
- 2 Judy: oh, have we still got more to do? (.) Right [claps hands] everybody if you can all come in again
- 3 [models return to the studio continue talking about the D.I.Y models]
- 4 Judy: [to Richard] Right, it's your turn now
- 5 Richard: We're massively over time. I think it's your turn now
- 6 Judy: Is it? Where are we (.) oh, we're there...

[7/7/98]

Admitting that you have miscalculated the timing of a slot and lost your place in the script are all events that can be comfortably worked out in front of the camera and not hidden



from the spectator 'backstage' as one might usually expect in traditional forms of broadcasting (Goffman, 1981).

In the next example, in a phone-in, there is fairly lengthy period of time where things are apparently going wrong:

- 1 Judy: ...w- we'll go to Helen first from Bedfordshire- Oh (.) [hearing something in her earpiece]  
2 we can't start with Helen Ok↑ay we'll bring [turning over sheet] Helen in later- we'll go to Ka  
3 first who's calling from Bedfordshire [looks at sheet] no, Bedfor- um  
4 Richard: Get on with it woman-  
5 Judy: Right um [clears throat] we start with Kay who's calling from Lincolnshire, this isn't religious  
6 though, hello Kay  
7 (2)  
8 Oh dear (1) Oh::[: dear  
9 Richard: [Shall we do some tap dancing? Raj can you sing? Can you do any turns?  
10 Raj: mmm some quick therapy heh, heh, heh  
11 Judy: Are you there Kay?  
12 Caller: Hello::  
13 Judy: Oh, heh, heh, thank god for that. I thought you'd completely disappeared. You are Kay aren't y  
14 Caller: No. I'm Debbie  
15 Judy: [Oh, right, heh, heh, heh  
16 Richard: [heh, heh, heh  
17 Raj: [heh, heh, heh

[18/1/96]



8 Dr. Ruth: On this programme? not with me sitting here, heh, heh, heh, heh

9 Richard: No, on this programme, no listen it's going on prescription September-

10 October of this year in Britain, right. What we do is we could set up a couple

11 of- with Dr. Chris who's our G.P. we could set up a couple of control groups

12 and we could have one taking it and one not and couples, married couples

13 taking it and I bet you that a proportion of people who have taken the

14 placebo will nevertheless report an enhanced- =

15 Dr. Ruth: =because they th [ink they're

16 taking it

17 Richard: [because

18 they think they're taking it.

[*This Morning* 7/7/98]

In September of that year, as the drug was released for sale in the UK, the programme hit the headlines for screening a test of the Viagra drug by sending three middle-aged couples to a hotel and getting them to return later on the programme to report on the drug's success.<sup>6</sup> This example highlights the programme's appeals to liveness, spontaneity and to its evolution within real time. As the drug was released, *This Morning* tested it and so the programme, like a soap opera, evolves contemporaneously with our own lives.

Topics used on magazine programmes are often referenced through 'real' world events that are happening 'now', such as the Viagra instance above. For example, all of the openings of *Good Morning* begin by chatting about a news story in that day's papers for example. In

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<sup>6</sup> This programme received a good deal of press attention as complaints were made by the Impotence Association and the drug manufacturers. (*The Guardian* 18/9/98)



January 1996 there was a news story about a thirteen year-old British girl getting married to a Turkish waiter whilst on holiday with her parents. The day after the story broke *Good Morning* interviewed a mother and daughter who claimed to have been approached by the same waiter whilst staying in the same resort. *This Morning* often base their topics for phone-ins on topical news stories, for instance, the phone-in on relationships which need to overcome major differences, was predicated on the recent wedding of celebrities Imran Khan and Jemima Goldsmith:

- 1     Judy:         ... on a::ll the front pages is the glamorous Imran Khan and the stunning twenty-  
2                   one-year old Jemima Goldsmith [cut to the days newspaper front pages] They  
3                   finally went and did it. Last night in Paris in an Islamic wedding ceremony and  
4                   judging from the kind of doom and gloom articles that have been written about  
5                   them you'd think the bri:de had just sentenced herself to a life in jail.
- 6     Richard:    Yeh, but it certainly wasn't a last tango in Paris for Jemima- she wasn't even  
7                   allowed to hug or kiss the groom at their ceremony cos' of the ru:les- they're  
8                   obviously in love and good luck to them- but we're fascinated here by this kind of  
9                   marriage and we'd love to hear from YOU this morning, if you and your partner  
10                  have had to overcome some massive basic difference (.) religious, political, sexual,  
11                  whatever. So if you're at loggerheads whether its working ou:t or it's falling apart,  
12                  give us and psychiatrist Raj Pursaud a ring...

[30/6/97]

The use of the day's newspapers draws attention to the programme's evolution within 'real' time. The emphasis upon 'real' time and the 'real world' within the content is central to the contemporaneous experience of the 'everyday', quite literally every day.

The appearance of the text as spectacle is also transgressed by the frequent references to the production staff on the programme. Those that would normally be 'backstage' often become part of the 'frontstage' performance (Goffman, 1981). This often happens when camera men are consulted as to where they want the presenter to look (another feature that is often generic to live television) but more often in *This Morning* and *Good Morning* the camera crews', make-up artists', directors' and editors' *real* lives (alongside the presenters') become part of the content. In the summer of 1998 Nick, the editor of *This Morning*, was being weighed weekly on the programme as he took part in a diet series segment and at the end of every series one of the production team is chosen to be 'made-over'. We are reminded several times of the personalities and even private lives of the production staff. In this particular example, Judy Finnegan is seemingly filling the viewer in on why the programme is auditioning for a D.I.Y expert:

Judy: ... Well, looks like we've got all these guys who've been nominated by mums, girlfriends, wives, sisters, whatever 'cause they're gorgeous and very handy, because just to get the, y'know, background, our editor's wife Zoe is looking for a new handyman, hence our programme, so as usual whatever Nick wants we have to do.

[laughter in the studio, noticeably from the studio crew too]

[7/7/98]

Later, in the same programme, even the director's comments become incorporated into the phone-in conversation despite the viewer not being able to hear her voice:

[On 'Dr. Ruth's sex clinic' a woman calls in with a problem that Dr. Ruth gives her advice on, which she suggests the caller, Emma, should act on tonight]

1 Richard: But isn't it the Brazil game tonight?

2 Emma: I think so yeah

3 Richard: We::ll:: its all over then isn't it?

4 Emma: I could cope if it [was just the World Cup

5 Dr. Ruth [ Well you might have to wait until tomorrow

6 Judy: It probably is the World Cup [shrugs] you know it probabl-

7 Richard: = This's been going on for

8 four months, it's only been on for three weeks

9 Judy: We:ll [t.hh .hh. hh

10 Emma: [the World Cup feels like it's been going on for four months

11 Richard: [holding his ear piece] That's what our Director just said, that's just what our

12 Director just said.

[7/7/98]

Here the production equipment, such as the presenter's ear-piece to the director, which might usually be kept as an invisible aid to the smooth running of the show, is made visible and part of the show's performance. The concepts of 'frontstage' and 'backstage' are clearly blurred in *This Morning* and *Good Morning*, transgressing conventional boundaries of spectatorship.

### 5.1.3 Chat

As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the arguments that accompanies the discussion about the breakdown of the spectactator/performer distinction is Scannell's discussion of 'sociability' (1996) which manifests itself as less formal speech styles across multiple genres and thus assists in reducing the distance between performers and their audiences. Here Tolson's (1991) discussion of the genre of chat as discussed in Chapter Four is also



relevant. He suggests chat's generic structure is apparent through topic shifts to the personal through clear shifts of 'register'.

These features are identifiable in the conversations that occur on *This Morning*, more so than in the more scripted *Good Morning*, which could perhaps be an indicator of the outcome of the ratings war. In fact the shift to the personal is used at the opening of almost every *This Morning* interview or introduction of a guest or presenter. Consider the opening of the segment with Nancy Lamb *This Morning's* Singaporean chef:

[After segment with 'hunky' D.I.Y men]

1 Richard: Did you enjoy that Nancy?

2 Nancy: Very much lovely body

3 Richard: Did you enjoy that Judy?

4 Judy: er::m (.) it was alright (.) erm now erm you know [puts arm around Nancy]

5 Nancy's daughter's just graduated, she's got a really [good degree hasn't she?

6 Richard: [hat in?

7 Nancy: [I'm very pleased

8 Richard: What in?

9 Nancy: Economics and computer science all she needs is to=

10 Judy: =two one?

11 Nancy: Two -one [with honours ye::h.

12 Judy: [two- one oh good for her (.) what's she called?

13 Nancy: Augusta

14 [conversation continues about Nancy's daughter until there's a topic shift to

15 the food segment that Nancy is to present]

16 Judy: Now tell us about this food festival...

[7/7/98]

Although Nancy has been on the programme before she is not one of the regular slot presenters. The way of introducing her therefore communicates to the viewer her ordinariness. It is reminiscent of an introduction in daily interaction since it suggests 'this is what she has in common with you'. We are told details of something that has just happened in her life which involves her family and her private life. Nancy becomes 'one of us', fitting the world of the show, displaying conventional motherly pride in her daughter's achievements that exist in the real world, in real time.

Through the show, Nancy Lamb has acquired some celebrity status, but as we see here it is through the construction of her as 'ordinary' that she becomes a personality which accords with Langer's (1981) personality system. In the world of *This Morning* and *Good Morning* the emphasis on the personal also extends to those who might elsewhere be afforded 'expert' status. For instance, the introduction of Dr. Ruth Westheimer has a similar emphasis on the personal. She is introduced as though we have met her before (and indeed she has been on the show previously) - as an old friend returning:

1 Richard: [to camera] Well she's an old friend of This Morning, [to Dr. Ruth] hello [back

2 to camera] Dr. Ruth is here [back to Ruth] lovely to see you again.

3 Dr. Ruth: Hello there, glad you've moved to London, [easier for us yes

4 Richard: [well it makes it easier for you doesn't

5 it that was one of the reasons behind it to be honest erm, well how are you? Its

6                   been a few years since we saw you.

7    Dr. Ruth:    I'm very good

8    Richard:    Yeh? you still doing the radio stuff in New York?

9    Dr. Ruth:    I do a lot of radio a lot of television. No:t my own show which is wonderful

10               because this way I have my Sunday evenings free but I still talk about sex. I'm a

11               grandmother of three no:w and I still talk as explicitly and as clearly about these

12               issues. [to Richard] I see you are smiling

13   Richard:    no, no I'm [pleased

14   Dr. Ruth:               [I have to say the word sex. Guess what happened to me last night. I

15               went...

16               [Ruth tells a story about her visit to the theatre and getting kissed back stage

17               by the lead male]

[7/7/98]

Sociability is clearly marked here. The introduction of Dr. Ruth into the programme is presented as though she is visiting old friends, not delivering a performance as such. The interaction begins with greetings that are more usually associated with daily conversation, 'lovely to see you again' and notice how Ruth remarks on how glad she is of the move to London. *This Morning* moved from Manchester to London to attract more guests but it is presented in this extract not as though the show, the studio, has moved, but more as part of the presenters' lives, '*you* have moved to London'. Indeed the fusion of the life of the show with the life of the *real* world was suggested at the time of the show's move by articles on Judy's worries about leaving her home town and the children's move of schools. Thus the 'world' of the show is blurred with the 'lifeworld' of the presenters as we 'drop in' to this mediated domestic space.



The extract continues as though we are catching up on the life of an old friend - Dr. Ruth is not initially introduced in terms of the function she will provide on the show, which is later revealed as hosting a sex therapy phone-in, but rather in terms of a personal emphasis related to her relationship with Richard and Judy and her private life whilst she has been away. She even relates a narrative of 'guess what happened to me last night' which reasserts both co-temporality and the importance of her daily, routine life as 'one of us'. What is remarkable about extracts such as these is not that there is a *shift* to the personal "such that the primary business of the format is temporarily delayed or suspended" (Tolson, 1991:179) but rather that the personal emphasis on chat provides the structuring frame through which guests are allowed to inhabit the domestic world of the show.

I have remarked earlier how, as viewers of daytime television, we are privileged to a 'para-social' *knowing* of personalities (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Langer suggests that it is the element of disclosure, as we have seen in the extracts above, that suggests that we are seeing celebrities 'as they really are' and not in terms of their public selves (1981:361). Tolson elaborates evidence of this within the chat show as he suggests that celebrities 'perform' synthetic personality in the interests of 'good television'. In such instances, through interviews over time, the viewing audience may build a 'para-social' relationship with various personalities.

In the morning magazine show I would argue that the main presenters sustain this kind of relationship through the daily iteration of 'real life experience' as fundamental to the creation of the show's familiar world. Many of the links are inflected with personal

experience. For instance, in this next example from *Good Morning*, Nick is introducing a topic for viewers to call in and give an opinion,

1      Nick:      ...and also something I've seen in the paper today er a very sma:ll story and I think it's  
2                    worth more in *The Mirror* new man is dead. It says the eighties wimp who changes  
3                    nappies, cooks and shares chores is officially dead- ye::es [laughter from crew] cor  
4                    what a relief- I can go back to being normal again [laughter from crew] the worst  
5                    moment was when I was pushin' the double-buggy arou:nd on a Saturday afternoon-  
6                    Saturday afternoon, round the shops when I should have been on the terraces at Luton  
7                    shoutin' things like [sings] 'you're goin' 'ome in a Luton ambulance' [laughter from  
8                    crew] anyway:: anyway the number to call o, one two one, four, one five, five  
9                    thousand. Is it good that new man is officially dead, according to the new survey?  
[26/1/96]

The topic, therefore, is introduced not only as contemporary news but also something that relates to Nick's personal experience. The way he presents it is rather 'tongue-in-cheek' drawing upon conventional, and arguably within these shows, compulsory, heterosexuality. I would suggest that Nick's para-social address involves a flirtation with an assumed 'community' of female viewers which in this instance incites many women to call in.

Revealing private lives is common in both shows - consider this extract from the *This Morning* hair dressing section with Nicki Clarke:

1      Nicki:      ...and of course on Fleur she's got dead straight hair and she would just wash and  
2                    leave her hair. She's just had it all cut off hasn't she?  
3      Richard:    Yeh it used to be long didn't it?





Part of the appeal of *This Morning* is the relationship between the presenters Richard and Judy as husband and wife whilst Ann and Nick are not married. The media made much of this in the alleged 'sofa wars' between the two magazine programmes. Indeed, it was suggested that this was the reason why *This Morning* beat *Good Morning* in the ratings war:

Why then when like played like, was one liked more than the other? The answer is almost certainly sex or, anyway, marriage [...] The whole point of ampersand celebrities is their physical relationship. Viewers like watching Richard and Judy for subtle clues as to what goes on in the bedroom or, for more decorous members of the audience, at breakfast. Otherwise routine appearances by the doctor, the agony aunt, the cook and the financial adviser are enlivened by the search for hints of frostiness between the couple on domestic issues [...] This was the key to their gender appeal. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said last week in a different context, alternatives to marriage are not, in this slot, quite the same. (Lawson, M. *The Guardian* 5/12/95)

As such their private relationship provides interesting scenarios and banter, in terms of a real relationship being played out on screen.<sup>7</sup> For example:

[Introducing the day's contents]

- 1 Judy: ...er hot foot on the footsteps of The Corrs, Boyzone and Bewitched, Ireland's latest
- 2 pop export Kerry Ann, she's with us live at ten past twelve
- 3 Richard: Actually, I've met Kerry-Ann outside my dressing room she was in the corridor,
- 4 standing waiting to be ( ) she's really nice=

<sup>7</sup> The couple's personal relationship is often subject matter for the tabloid press. After some photographs of Judy in a bikini on holiday were featured in the tabloid press with cruel commentary, Richard was interviewed for the front page of the *Scottish Mirror* (2/5/96), headlined, "THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR MARRIAGE, Judy gives me a tremendous sexual charge."

5 Judy: =as long as it wasn't inside your  
6 dressing room  
7 Richard: ↑I'm old enough to be her grandad heh, heh, heh. Anyway there's nobody, nobody  
ever comes into my dressing room, my hallowed portal  
8 Judy: Apart from me  
9 Richard: Only if you knock  
10 Judy: Come on  
11 Richard: Come on lets get on.

[7/7/98]

In this extract Richard and Judy are splicing the presenting of the show with banter that is expected of them *as they really are* as husband and wife, displaying jealousy and teasing each other. This heterosexual display again accords with a traditionalism which is reinforced throughout these para-social relationships. Being 'like us' is a particular, conventional 'us' which is the assumed domain of 'Mrs Daytime Consumer' - the addressee. What I am also arguing, is that these particular para-social relationships are not only built through disclosures that are *asides* to the more dominant course of the programme, but rather they are the foundations of a broad knowledge, built over time in which we engage with the *real* world which is embedded into the programme.

Tolson points to the *knowingness* of television performers' construction of personality in the chat show, "there is a sustained and highly self-reflexive metadiscourse about television as a cultural institution. Here participants not only invoke the cultural knowledge of the viewer, they also draw attention to the construction of their own performances" (1991:183). For instance, he invokes a Wogan interview with Bob Monkhouse:

Monkhouse: ...There are parts of you which have never been seen on the TV screen (*audience laughter*).

I for one hope they will never be seen.

Wogan: You nearly got into a compliment there. And you decided to duck out of it. Because a little bit of the real Bob came out there and you quickly shoved it back again.

Monkhouse: Yes, yes I don't really want to, no exposing myself on the TV screen is not my idea of fun.

(*Wogan* 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1984, cited in Tolson, 1991:186)

Tolson attributes this kind of self-reflexivity to a 'knowingness' elaborated by Cardiff (1988) which belongs to the genre of comedy. One can see how this functions in a programme like *The Dame Edna Experience* and possibly is more evident in the Nick Owen 'new man' example, but this is not always the case on *This Morning*. In the examples discussed here, there is certainly no obvious sense of 'performing' the sincere. Allusions to the *real* world do not stand out in the text as extraordinary as they have no sense of comedic performance or irony, even if they are self-reflexive in terms of the knowing unravelling of the text. For instance, this next example appears seamlessly within Nancy Lamb's cookery section:

[Nancy Lamb is cooking banana fritters]

1 Nancy: ...let it sit for an hour and then let it fry (.) Do not let your oil too hot because this is  
2 raw er banana so when you cook it slowly and you get crispier and crispier each  
3 time.

4 Judy: mmm, mmm

5 Richard: We had erm we had Sunday lunch with Vanessa on Sunday (.) because it was



6                    Sunday lunch =

7     Nancy:                        =Yes

8     Richard:     - .hh and she did baked bananas, didn't she=

9     Judy:                                        =baked in the oven=

10    Richard:    =just put them in the

11                    oven, yeh that was all and they were deli::cious

[7/7/98]

One might want to remark that what occurs in this exchange is a shift of 'register' in the way that Tolson (1991) describes, whereby Richard's contribution shifts the discussion from the programme content to a personal anecdote. However, I would argue that the shift is not so dramatic as this, it appears as perfectly unremarkable within the programme's world. The shift is not stylistically noticeable in the way implied by a change in 'register', rather I would suggest that moves to personal anecdotes like this one are more accurately described as shifts of 'footing':

A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. A change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events [...] participants over the course of their speaking constantly change their footing, these changes being a persistent feature of natural talk. (Goffman, 1981:128)

Implying a shift in 'register' suggests that the speaker leaves behind one style of speech address and takes up another but the concept of 'footing' suggests a much more fluid usage of speech styles where one can "sustain more than one state of talk simultaneously" (1981:155). Therefore, by thinking about moves to the personal in this way, we do not have

to consider that there is one dominant state of talk, relegating other states to asides. As I argued earlier in the introduction of Nancy Lamb and Dr. Ruth, on *This Morning* it is usual for the personal to be the framing theme of some conversations, where the footings of 'animator' (expert discourses on psychology or cookery) and 'author' (discourses of personal experience) begin to merge.

To return to the extract above then, the shift of footing is significant, not in terms of its production of a comedic register, but in terms of the 'world' that we are encouraged to inhabit on the programme. The reference to 'Sunday lunch at Vanessa's' is unremarkable in terms of the show's norms, but interesting in terms of Scannell's use of H.P. Grice's term 'communicative intentionality'.<sup>8</sup> It can be understood by bringing to mind Grice's concept of 'implicature' since this aside about Sunday lunch at Vanessa's, without any other elaboration by Richard, is nevertheless meaningful to the show's audience, highlighting a difference between what is said and what is meant. The assumed community of 'Mrs Daytime Consumers' are expected to share the knowledge that the 'Vanessa' referred to here is actually Vanessa Feltz, another personality of morning television who used to have a slot on *This Morning* and, at the time this particular programme was aired, had her own talk show directly preceding *This Morning* on ITV's schedule. The private relationship and the public one are thus blurred at the same time as contributing to the seamless structuring of the morning schedule that I suggested in Chapter Three.

This 'inferentiality' is common on the programme; consider the way in which the soap star was introduced in the opening introductory segment by Richard: 'it's all changed down in

Weatherfield, Britain's first ever soap transsexual joins us live'. There is no reference to the actual name of the soap opera, just Weatherfield, which it is assumed that 'Mrs Daytime Consumer' will know and understand to be the setting for *Coronation Street*. A knowledge of soap opera is part of the assumed feminine cultural competence of inhabiting the world of morning television. This background knowledge is part of the communicative intentionality of the programme, where any distinction between the real world and the life of the show is blurred. If we return to Carpignano et. al's (1990) discussion it would seem that here at least the distinction between Habermas' 'lifeworld' and 'system' is apparently eroded in the removal of a clear boundary between mediated performance and lived experience.

#### 5.1.4 The production of spontaneity

I would argue, however, that what happens in the morning magazine programme is that the real world and the world of the show are *produced* to create a feeling of co-spatiality and co-temporality that is part of the production format of the show. Although it is clear that Richard and Judy, more so than Ann and Nick, include adlibbed speech throughout the programme, the integration of 'lifeworld' experience is still a constructed sense of the televisual text. Whilst it may appear more chaotic than other apparently more tightly produced genres, it is still part of a deliberate communicative strategy that engages the largely female audience at home.

Both shows are structured around a tight scheduling of each segment and the viewer is constantly reminded of the timing of each slot with a menu, at least four times throughout

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Four.



the programmes' duration. Spontaneous chat appears around scripted parts of the show and scripted links are visible through the personalities' use of the auto-cue as they address the camera. Consider this example from *Good Morning*:

[Link from recorded segment on dressing for work]

1     Nick:        Thanks Nicki- she'll be back again next week talking about glamour. (.) .hh no::w its  
2                Burns night tonight and everybody'll be at it tonight ↑will they o::h (.) as the great  
3                poet himself said, Robert Burns in the eighteenth century, there's threesome reels,  
4                foursome reels, there's hornpipes and Strathspayes man. What am I talking about?  
5                The art of Scottish dancing, but may be it's not as simple as it first appears.  
6                [cut to recorded segment of clips of Ceilidh dancing]

[25/1/96]

It is clear here (and through visual cues and eye-movement) that Nick is reading from auto-cue. Notice that it is also scripted to imply spontaneity - Nick's aside at the double-entendre (line 2). Scripted links provide stability to the other less controlled moments - phone-ins for example. The segmentation of the magazine programme means that the presenters are constantly reminding the viewers of 'what's coming up next'. Essentially, therefore, the presenters are often repeating themselves, but the monotony of this is dealt with by the scripting of these reminders with quips. For example, on *This Morning*:

[link to the midday news]

1     Judy:        Right, time for the national headlines right now and also the news from your ow:n  
2                area- Do join us again in eight minutes for the rest of the morning. Joining us live  
3                that perfect scoundrel Peter Bowles .hh and Chynna Philipps, daughter of the Mama



5 Judy: Oh, for goodness sake you two wind it up, what's the ↑matter?

6 Susan: He's hopeless

7 Judy: Yeh, well [( )

8 Fred: [I'm not hopeless, you've got the charts

9 Judy: [direct address to camera and auto-cue]

10 How to wind anyone up (.) give them a piece of flat-pack furniture to assemble, just

11 watch the knives fly, is it worth it, you can now pay one firm to do it for you but we

12 thought it would be more fun to make Susan and Fred do it.

[18/1/96]

Clearly here there is a self-consciousness that surrounds a definite 'performance' of spontaneity which more accurately echoes Tolson's observations about a comedic 'knowingness'. This extract stands out as if it has been carefully produced like a short skit. The personalities become 'actors' as they play out the 'real life' experience of couples putting up flat-pack furniture. Whilst much of the morning magazine shows emphasise their co-temporality and the personalities 'as they really are', it would be naïve to ignore that these are nevertheless strategies which are *produced* and *managed* to televisual effect and the production process becomes most visible in the scripted parts of the show. Therefore, the evocation of the 'lifeworld' experience is part of the televised appeal and part of the drama of 'other people's lives' that unfolds before us. Presenters, guests and crew on magazine programmes are still to some extent performing narratives of personal experience which are ultimately transformed by the medium of television, however much these revelations appear as 'authentic'. The 'real selves' here are also, mundane and conventional 'television selves' - white heterosexual, middle-class couples who address their audience as 'just like us'.



Television's ultimate goal is entertainment and the performance of 'real' selves is still controlled by the institutional context of the production of the 'televisual' requirements of drama. And this is possibly more apparent in the structure of talk shows since the ultimate rationale for the genre can be seen to be the production of dramatic tension.

## 5.2 The UK morning talk show

As has been previously discussed in Chapter Three, the phenomenon of the television talk show has often been afforded a privileged position within current debates about the nature of a mediated public sphere. The emphasis on the breakdown of spectacle here is founded by its emphasis on ordinary, 'lay' people's lives, rather than on presenters', guests' and crew's constructions as ordinary. In the magazine programme, although they are central to its appeals to participation, ordinary people are present intermittently, as callers or interviewees; whereas in the talk show they provide most of the talk continuously throughout the show.

The morning talk shows which preceded *This Morning* and *Good Morning* on British television during the duration of this research were, *The Time... The Place (TTTP)*, eventually replaced by *Vanessa*<sup>9</sup> (for a short time both were on air before *This Morning*), and *Kilroy* preceded *Good Morning*, which is still running (BBC1).<sup>10</sup> According to Haarman's (1999) criteria, *Kilroy* and *TTTP* belong to the audience discussion format genre of the talk show, which is concerned with public issues, whereas *Vanessa* belongs to the

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<sup>9</sup> February 1998.

<sup>10</sup> *Kilroy* moves to BBC2 for the summer schedule of children's programming.

'therapy' sub-genre of talk show - this presents some stylistic variations. Many of these programmes however, offer a discursive space where *ordinary* people meet and interact with institutional representatives in a public forum and thus, as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, the talk show format has been applauded for its democratic potential. One of the key critical expositions of this point of view can be found in the essay by Carpignano et al., whereby the authors claim that the talk show attempts to present "an exercise in electronic democracy" (1990:48). In this view, the talk show is distinctive in its promise of participation and apparent challenging of traditional hierarchies. It involves real people, talking about real life experiences in real time, which gives them a claim to authenticity that assists in the talk show's performance of the championing of the ordinary citizen.

The construction of the talk show's format offers cues which serve to blur the distinctions between the studio and the home audience and facilitate a feeling of 'live' common-sense debate that is, in Habermasian terms, more akin to the 'life-world' than to the 'system'. For instance, the openings of these shows demonstrate a commitment to involve the 'ordinary viewer' at home as well as the ordinary speaker in the studio. I will detail exactly how these talk shows call the viewer to participate in the next section of this chapter.

### **5.2.1 The talk show's relationship with the viewer at home**

The title sequences foreground a relationship with the audience at home. On *Kilroy* and *Vanessa* these are made up of montages of the presenters' faces cut with graphics. Thus they emphasise the centrality of the personality of the presenter. *TTTP* is even more interesting. It opens with an image of a sunrise; followed by an image of someone

collecting two pints of milk from the doorstep; then John Stapleton in a kitchen apparently at home drinking (by inference) a cup of tea; then a shot of John doing up his tie; John hailing a cab; John getting a train; John arriving in the studio and the title music stops as he enters the studio to applause. *TTTP* was broadcast live from Monday to Friday at 10.15 am from different parts of the country. Thus the title sequence implies a narrative of John as an ordinary man, every day getting up for work and travelling to studios around the U.K.. The recorded title sequence of John at home flows into the 'live' event occurring in the studio. His real life 'now' is part of his televised appearance, again blurring boundaries of time and space.

Another strategy occurs before the title sequence of *TTTP* and *Vanessa*, where both presenters directly address the camera to introduce the programmes' issues of the day. In the *The Time...The Place*, John Stapleton stands backstage sometimes in front of a busy crew and sometimes so that the studio audience are visible. This location helps to blur the frontstage/backstage distinction that I argued was crucial to the para-social imperatives contained within the magazine programmes. A typical pre-show address looks like this:

1     John S:     [direct address]  
2                He:llo: good morning how would you feel if your partner said you couldn't see your  
3                children again. Well I'm joined today by lots of dads who say they're being denied  
4.                that right and some mothers who say their youngsters don't need a dad.  
                  [cut to title sequence]

[12/6/96]



The audience at home are addressed directly as 'you', assuming a para-social relationship with the viewer at home by asking a question of them. (It is also a 'you' that is assumed to have children.) The viewer is therefore invited to consider their position on the upcoming issue, thus preparing them for involvement, and importantly establishing them as participators (and here parents), in the upcoming debate. Vanessa employs the same strategy except she is pictured 'backstage' resting on a television set which bears the programme's logo:

- 1     Vanessa:     [direct address]  
2                   Do you ever go green with envy or fee:l you're going to exPLO::DE with jealousy-  
3                   have you ever been driven to the edge or done something totally unforgivable like  
4.                   chucking paint all over your partner's clothes or chopping up his suits in a jealous  
5.                   rage. Today we'll be grappling the green-eyed monster.  
                    [cut to title sequence]

[16/1/96]

In this example, Vanessa elaborates upon the topic of jealousy and gives the viewer more examples upon which they can 'identify' themselves as participants. Notice that also this is gendered address to a heterosexual female viewer: 'chopping up his suits in a jealous rage' (line 4). This direct address foregrounds the place of the viewer as not simply privy to the debate about to take place, but also as a member of the ensuing discussion. After all, talk show debates are doubly articulated, televised for an audience at home which is as crucial to market forces as the audience in the studio is to production.

This situating of the viewer at home within the terms of the debate follows in the hosts' openings of all three programmes *after* the title sequence.

1     Kilroy     **[direct address]**  
2                Hello and good morning. Do you trust the police? Do they do enough: to fight  
3                crime? (.) Are they over zealous (.) heavy handed (.) racist? We:ll the courts seem to  
4                think they are sometimes (.) Last week one man was awarded one hundred and eight  
5                thousand pounds after the police used false evidence against him. Another was  
6                awarded three hundred and two thousand pounds after he was brutally treated by the  
7                police (.)**[ moves up the stage to a member of the audience and camera moves**  
8                **with him]** And yet often the police don't seem to do what we want them to do do  
9                they Michelle, do they do enough to deal with the problem that you've got in your  
10               area?

Again, Kilroy establishes a relationship with the viewer by asking questions of them. He also situates the topic for discussion within contemporary 'real' world occurrences. What is interesting is the way in which the appeal to the viewer is linked to beginning the discussion with the studio audience. He moves up the stage to 'Michelle' and addresses her by her first name as one of the lay members of the audience. It is almost as though Kilroy knows Michelle and this familiarity accompanies the familiarity with which he has just addressed the viewer. There is an implied connection, therefore, with the viewer at home and the lay member of the audience. John Stapleton does the same thing in *TTTP*:

1     John S     **[After title sequence walk in to applause from studio audience]**  
2                **[addresses the studio audience]** Thank-you, thank-you very much indeed.

3            [direct address to camera] Hello::: good morning, good morning to you at home.  
4.           Well we all know that one in three marriages in this country end up in divorce and  
5           there can be nothing more heart rending and difficult than deciding who has custody  
6           of the children and how that access will work. But what happens when one partner  
7           says sorry no way can you have access to the children. That's what a lot of parents  
8           in the audience have decided, [starts to walk up the stage] Maria's one of them.  
9           [addresses Maria] How old is he?

[12/6/96]

John here, although he uses direct address, does not address the audience as 'you', rather he uses the assumed community of 'we' (line 4). He then moves on to talk about parents and access but, like Kilroy, begins the debate by the link to the 'ordinary' member of the public, 'Maria'.

This move from direct address to the viewer at home to the lay audience member is important. The camera moves up the stage with both Kilroy and John Stapleton, and is then fixed within the studio audience. Once here the camera often uses a subjective camera angle as though we, the viewers are situated within the studio audience. Throughout the discussion, the camera angles include close-ups of speakers or the presenter or a shot of a small group of speakers but we never again get a complete view of the stage and the audience until the very end. Thus, throughout most of the discussion, the viewer has crossed the boundary of the 'stage' and is located within the action. In this way I would argue that the shooting of the discussion programme attempts to draw in the viewer at home, suggesting their co-presence. Whilst this may not be the domestic space of the home



as in the magazine programme, the process nevertheless suggests a shared space in the studio.

The spatial organisation of the *Vanessa* programme operates a little differently. Here, there is a stage where selected 'ordinary' people, who are introduced as 'guests' in the style of an interview, discuss their personal experience, responding to questions asked by Vanessa.

Vanessa situates herself within the studio audience and moves around allowing members of the studio audience to ask questions of the participants on stage. This style is different to *Kilroy* and *TTTP*, which is related to their different discursive frameworks, however, they all rely on the telling of ordinary experience. Nevertheless, Vanessa still employs a similar strategy of engaging the viewer in an assumed relationship before introducing the first 'guest':

- |    |         |  |
|----|---------|--|
| 1  | Vanessa | [Vanessa walks in to applause then directly addresses the camera]  |
| 2  |         | <u>Hello</u> and welcome to the show. Most of us if we're <u>really</u> honest get jealous from                  |
| 3  |         | time to time but what happens if jealousy takes over your life? Well my first guest                              |
| 4. |         | admits that she is obsessively jealous to find out more let's meet Marissa [guest<br>walks on stage to applause] |

[16/1/96]

The viewer at home is directly addressed and incorporated as having a relationship with jealousy, 'Most of *us* if we're really honest' (line 2) and we are then connected to the guest in terms of what might happen if that jealousy, 'takes over your life'. The subjective camera then works differently as neither Vanessa, nor the camera move up onto the stage, rather

we are situated with the host and studio audience. We are therefore encouraged to identify with Vanessa and the audience in interrogating the guests' experiences. Whilst the concept of 'stage' is more complicated here, we are still invited into the studio audience, which is still part of the televised stage, through the subjective camera.

Drawing the viewer in as vicarious participant is also reinforced by emphasising the viewer at home as a potential studio participant. In all of these mid-morning talk programmes there are invitations to take part in future shows. These appeals occur in the same way that the magazine programmes appeal for callers for their phone-in debates. For instance on *Vanessa*:

1     Vanessa     Have you got the best love story Britain's ever heard? Has your love survived  
2                   separations, illness or tremendous difficulties? Perhaps you met when you were both  
3                   young, split up and got back together again years later? We want to hear your  
4                   amazing, unbelievable and romantic love stories for a *Vanessa* Valentines Day  
5                   special so if you're sitting on the:: story that will make the country sob, give *Vanessa*  
6                   a call now on o eight nine one, eleven, eleven, sixty-four.

[16/1/96]

Or on *Kilroy*:

1     Kilroy     Are you married to your partner's job? Does their work take up all their time? Has it  
2                   ruined your life? Perhaps you are the wife of a policeman, or the husband of a  
3                   teacher or you're married to a vicar? Either way call Kilroy now, on o double nine o  
4                   two hundred five six, seven if your partner's career (.) comes before you and your

5 family and has put your relationship in jeopardy

[14/5/96]

Notice the gendered and middle-class assumptions that are present in Kilroy's appeal - 'the wife of a policeman or the husband of a teacher' (lines 2/3) replaying traditional assumptions about culturally appropriate gendered professions. In *TTTP* the appeals are very similar:

1 John S. If your family was susceptible to breast cancer, would you choose to have a  
2 mastectomy? Do you think it's better to have no breasts at all than breasts with a  
3 ninety percent chance of developing cancer? Or is it wrong to have healthy breasts  
4 removed? Perhaps you or your family have already made that decision. Do you think  
5 that genetic testing will lead to a healthier nation? Or is it better to know what  
6 diseases you'll develop in the future? Whatever your story or you view call us now o  
7 eight nine one seven hundred one four five.

[12/6/96]

The example above is clearly a gendered topic. But so also is its address, 'will *you* choose to have a mastectomy', and not 'what if your wife, girlfriend faced a mastectomy?' Many of the appeals were marked as gendered by inference.

These examples demonstrate the point that the audience at home are repeatedly asked to consider their own subjective experiences as potential for talk show debate. And, I would suggest, this affects the viewing experience. On *Vanessa* and *TTTP* these appeals occur directly after the advertising break, half way through the programme. Thus the relationship



between the viewer at home and the studio audience is again reinforced. The viewer at home is addressed as one of the wider network of talk show participants, ordinary people with ordinary, often gendered, experiences, 'have you?', 'are you?', 'would you?', 'will you?'.

Thus far I have argued that the morning talk show utilises similar strategies to the magazine programme in its suggestion of co-presence, co-temporality and often gendered address. These phenomena assist in the para-social implications of the text. However, the talk show is different to the magazine show as it relies on many ordinary and expert people coming together to debate a particular topic for the duration of the show. It is necessary therefore to think about how the 'drama' of the debate is constructed.

### **5.2.2 The evolution of debate on 'public issue' shows - *Kilroy* and *The Time...The Place***

I have suggested that the viewer at home is encouraged to feel affinity with 'ordinary' people who tell their stories in the talk show. This 'affinity' is reinforced throughout the discussion and the duration of the show. Having established the audience at home as sharing common ground with 'lay experience', that experience is subsequently validated and defended. According to Livingstone and Lunt (1994), the common sense stories of lay participants are often privileged over those of the institutional discourses of the expert, disrupting normative power dynamics. In such a forum, therefore, the traditional polarisation of the public and private is often eroded. This, it is claimed, accounts for an oppositional public sphere that encompasses the lived experiences of the citizen ('lifeworld') alongside the critique of state actions (the 'system').

However, I argue here that the precedence given to lay experience is not so much related to the inherent triumph of experiential common sense over abstract, institutionalised discourse, but more to the management of these discourses in accordance with televisual requirements. In fact, Livingstone and Lunt themselves recognize that there are checks to be made to assumptions of spontaneity:

While on the one level, all interactions are spontaneous and unique, conversations are highly rule-governed, frequently repetitive, and commonly used to repeat handed-down or unoriginal ideas (i.e. common sense). (1994:163)

It is this 'rule-governed' nature of the talk that I intend to engage with here. Talk shows are, after all, television programmes which are carefully researched, produced and to some extent pre-scripted. Ultimately the talk in question is produced with an overhearing audience at home in mind and in this chapter I argue that the pursuit of televisual drama is the main goal which affects the management and construction of talk show debate. Accordingly, I address questions about the host's role in the production of the talk and how the 'common sense' and expert discourses are elicited and managed for televised display.

### *The host as 'one of us'*

Audience discussion talk shows are often identified by the persona of the host - Kilroy, Vanessa and in *TTTP* the title sequence introduces John Stapleton in familiar surroundings. The centrality of the host is therefore established from the outset. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) describe the host's role as that of romantic 'hero' defending the right to speak of the

populace. Central to understanding the construction of the interaction in talk shows is the knowledge that the host is ultimately responsible for deciding who can take the floor in the debate. Mostly this is explicit in the power to select participants to speak but occasionally speakers gain the floor through self-selection. Either way, ultimately the host is responsible for allowing speakers to retain the floor.

The description of the host as romantic *hero* suggests that hosts situate themselves against established power<sup>11</sup>. This can be seen in Kilroy and John Stapleton's performance in the public issue oriented discussion programmes (I will discuss Vanessa later in the chapter). They maintain their 'authenticity' and position themselves (although Robert Kilroy-Silk is a former Labour MP) as heroes on the side of 'ordinary' people. This can be explained in terms of their management of the production of talk in the studio. Their orientation as 'one of the people', rather than the impartial journalistic figure that is encouraged in other kinds of television interview, is apparent from the opening of *Kilroy* that we considered earlier.

After Kilroy's establishment of a relationship with the general wider public - 'Do *you* trust the police'- he moves to cite *real* stories which set the scene for the primacy of the *real* event before moving to Michelle, given authenticity by reference to her first name, to invite her to relate *her* story about *her* area. On the other hand, 'the police' in this introduction remain a faceless, homogenous entity. Clearly the distinction here between 'us' and 'them'/'experts' versus 'lay' speakers, has already been drawn. The emphasis on the authority of the 'authentic' over the 'professional' is often marked in these shows. But this is not only



because of an inherent conflict between expert/lay discourse, it is also produced to meet televisual requirements, through the way in which the contributions are managed by the host.

The personalities therefore clearly position themselves as 'on our side' - as they engage in a management cycle whereby they: assist the lay speakers' production of narrative; formulate their narratives to produce ultimate tension for the experts; defend the lay speakers' rights to the floor and press the expert to answer a lay person's sense of injustice. Although Livingstone and Lunt do, to some extent, discuss how the host manages the debate to support lay voices over those of those of the expert, their analysis is mostly theoretical and does not pay close attention to the way in which turns are taken. I intend to look more closely at the kind of pre-allocated turn-taking system that applies here. Despite the appearance that it may have of being 'open' and random, the discussion is actually rather neatly executed and artfully managed in favour of lay speakers.

### *Selecting speakers and eliciting narratives*

The pre-scripted nature of the show is evident in both hosts' senses of the spatial orientation of the speakers and the roles they will play in the discussion. In most instances the host selects both lay and expert speakers by reference to their first names. At the beginning of the management cycle outlined above, the host selects a narrator by choosing a member of the audience to relate their personal story. The manner in which a key lay speaker is introduced to the floor is interesting because if the host addresses them by their

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<sup>11</sup> This is a description that is usually applied to male hosts - Donahue for example - in the more 'public issue' oriented versions of the genre. Female hosts - Oprah, Ricki Lake, Sally Jesse Raphael and here Vanessa - are

first name, prior knowledge of their experience also identifies the narrative context from which they are to speak. If we take the opening question from the example from *Kilroy*, the host has prior knowledge that Michelle has a problem in the area where she lives. Here he selects Jonathon, a black man, to tell a story about police racism:

[K=Kilroy, J=Jonathon]

- 1 K: Jonathon are the police racist? Jonathon?
- 2 J: I think in some cases the police are very racist...  
...
- 3 K: Do they treat you in a discriminatory way?

[15/5/96]

After Kilroy's prompting question, Jonathon proceeds to tell a story about having been stopped by the police on several occasions. It is clearly not a 'lucky guess' that this man has an experience to tell about racist treatment, as Kilroy accurately seeks Jonathon out amongst the audience at a pertinent moment in the discussion.

In *TTTP* John begins the show by addressing a woman whose story he is familiar with:

[JS = John Stapleton, K-A = Kerri-Ann, lay speaker]

- 1 J.S: Kerri-Ann is here, she is one woman who opted for sterilisation. [moves up stage and
- 2 addresses Kerri-Ann] How old are you Kerri-Ann?
- 3 K-A: Twenty-six.

[20/5/96]

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exclusively characterised as 'therapists' rather than 'heros' in the therapy sub-genre.

What is evident therefore in the these talk shows is that the hosts have considerable prior knowledge of some of the experiences of their guests and they work with the lay speakers to produce the narrative that they know they have to tell. In the next example it is clear that Kilroy is helping Michelle relate her experience:

[M=Michelle, K=Kilroy]

- 1      M:            Well first of all prior to this they've got my second son Dean hah hung him from the  
2                   balcony on the second floor by his ankles erm (.) he::'s got learning disabilities so he's  
3                   backward so=  
4      K:            =n: this group of youths you say that they have been terrorizing the neighborhood as  
5                   → well as your own son's to the extent that you've had to move to what a safe house?=  
6      M:            = a safe house

[15/5/96]

In this example, Kilroy introduces a piece of detail, referring to Michelle's move to a safe house (line 5) which she had not volunteered previously. It is clear in Kilroy's selection of speakers and the interaction that ensues, that the pre-production phases of the programming provide him with considerable knowledge of the details of contributors and their experiences. How the host then uses this knowledge of the 'life-world' becomes interesting to the strategies used to control the discourse.

Having selected a lay speaker, the host and the chosen interlocutor embark on a question/answer sequence. In everyday conversation, Searle (1969) suggests that there are two types of question:- the 'real' whereby the questioner asks about something s/he does not know, or the 'exam' whereby the questioner tests the other speaker about something s/he



already knows. As described above one of the features of this talk show is that Kilroy has prior knowledge of 'lay' participants stories and therefore the type of questioning might reflect an 'exam' style question under Searle's criteria. However, in this institutional context, the questioning is not so much a 'test' but rather a device involved in mediating communication. The question and answer sequence here does not, therefore, approximate those found in everyday conversation, but rather takes the form of an interview where the questions are being asked to elicit information (in these cases personal stories) for the overhearing audience. In this capacity, Kilroy's questions tend to be confined to asking for more detail or clarifying and expanding on certain parts of the relevant story as in the following two examples:

[K=Kilroy, M=Maria]

- 1 M: erm I've gone to em on several occasions with er threats that 'ave been made to my
- 2 son and er no one's taken me seriously
- 3 K: → What kind of threats?
- 4 M: um threat that they were gonna kill my eldest son
- 5 K: → Who's this?
- 6 M: A gang of youths where I live (.) they call themselves the Bronx posse er they've
- 7 terrorized people on my estate for quite a quite a number of years=
- 8 K: → = How did they
- 9 terrorize you what kind of things do they do?
- 10 M: um it all started back in October of la::st year (.) one of the youths asked my son
- 11 for a cigarette which e didn't have er the same evening, knocked on the door and
- 12 punched my boy in the face=
- 13 K: → =nnd what happened since then what kind of things

14                    have they done to you?

15 M: erm well, we've had to be moved out to a safe home er me and the children and er  
16 its still ongoing

17 K: → What kind of things do they do?

18 M: Well first of all prior to all this they've got my second son Dean hah hung from the  
19 balcony on the second floor by his ankles erm (.) he::'s got learning disabilities so  
20 he's a prime target he's backward so=

21 K: → =n: this is a group of youths you  
22 say that have been terrorizing the neighborhood as well as your own sons to the  
23 extent that you've had to be moved to what a safe house=

24 M: = a safehouse

25 K: → Who moved you?

26 M: erm it was the housing action trust where I live

**[15/5/96]**

In the following example John Stapleton clearly assists in telling this woman's story:

**[JS= John Stapleton, W = Jean]**

1 JS: First of all Jean why did you decide to become sterilised?

2 W: We:ll I had three boys I felt we had a complete family we- we were happy.

3 JS: And what were you told about the operation?

4      W:      Very little just that there was a risk of getting pregnant (.) I could have accepted that  
5      but I still wanted to have it done=

6 JS: → = you wanted it done so:: you went along to the  
7 hospital, you had the operation and then what?

8 W: Then: I- I started to feel ill after about a month. I was gettin' stingin' in me side, I was

9 swelling up, but I went to my G.P.'s and they sent me away:: possible infection and I

[illegible]

In this example it is clear that John is helping the women tell her story, even filling in parts of the narrative - (line 6). As the woman tells her story John is prompting her to produce pertinent points of the narrative, (lines 20, 22 and 24) until eventually we have the salient point - she was two months pregnant when she had the sterilisation operation. We are beginning to see at the end of this extract how the host leads the informant to the key point in the story - this point that can be used as the contentious issue with which to continue the debate.



Lay participants' stories, therefore, do not necessarily emerge spontaneously and develop freely. Thornborrow suggests that they are mutually produced by participant and host and often what becomes of key concern is not so much the story itself as the subsequent evaluation of it (1997:252). I would go further to suggest that the centrality of the evaluation is a result of the narrative's subjection to the host's *own* framing and evaluation which conforms to an agenda agreed prior to production. For instance, the prior knowledge of speakers and their stories not only allows the host to elicit certain material at pertinent points in the programming, but it also allows him a kind of editorial control. In Michelle's case, when Kilroy presents her problem in this way he has already made a subjective judgement about the police having not done enough in this case:

K: And yet often the police don't seem to do what we want them to do, do they Michelle,  
do they do enough to deal with the problem in your area?

Similarly, in the case of a woman who was falsely tried for murdering her husband, Kilroy has already framed the point of issue within which the woman is allowed to contribute her narrative:

- 1 K: ...we don't want them to be overzealous we don't want them to exceed their powers  
2 → (.) is there a feeling also that perhaps sometimes they make an arrest because they  
3 need to make an arrest just to get somebody?  
(Kilroy takes the microphone to woman who he knows will answer positively)  
4 W: Definitely

[15/5/96]

These questions therefore accomplish more than to reveal information for the overhearing audience (as in the news interview); they also work to reproduce an agenda within which information is to be interpreted.<sup>12</sup>

After eliciting lay speakers' stories through the question and answer sequence, the host must then must formulate the narrative so that it can be presented for comment to the rest of the audience or the expert. Heritage describes formulating as "summarizing, glossing or developing the gist of an informant's earlier statements" (1985:100) for the benefit of the over-hearing audience. It is thus more common in institutional contexts such as courtrooms and news interviews than in ordinary conversation.

Sometimes formulations can operate in a neutral or even a co-operative way to assist the communication of the lay story. Heritage refers to these as either 'prompts' or 'co-operative recycles'. An example of a 'co-operative recycle' in this talk show would be:

[P= Photographer arrested at demonstration ]

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | K: | What happened to you?   |
| 2 | P: | I was hit in the face by a policeman, [I was dragged off                          |
| 3 | K: | [wh- where where  |
| 4 | P: | Demonstration I'm a professional photographer I was photographing a               |
| 5 |    | demonstration (.) I had a press card I had my cameras around me the policeman ran |
| 6 |    | up and he smacked=  |

<sup>12</sup> I discuss the host's pursuit of agendas in the framing of lay narratives more extensively in Wood (in press).

7 K: =wh- what were you taking pictures of?

8 P: The demonstration (.) [arrests arrests

9 K: → [It was a demonstration arrests so it was arrests. There was a

10 bit of a kerffuffle (.) a bit of argy-bargy

[15/5/96]

At lines 9 and 10 Kilroy formulates the gist of the photographer's narrative to clarify the information for the over-hearer.

But, however co-operative these recycles appear, they can still perform a function in the talk show debate which can be understood in terms of the pursuit of televisual drama. This occurs in the next extract from a *TTTT* programme about absent fathers:

1 W: ...After he left, I had the baby, his behaviour continued to be bad, I monitored the

2 situation without introducing him to Samuel as his fa:ther (.) er just to see how the

3 ex-partner would progress (1) his behaviour remained the same.

4 JS: Unacceptable- we should make clear that this was socially unacceptable.

5 W: He's quite a dysfunctional adult

6 JS: To you

7 W: In my view yes .hh a lovely person but unfortunately his problems are such that he

8 is incapable of being unselfish and nurturing which is what I feel my children

9 deserve [...] I'm not against fathers being in the picture but I think when it's to the

10 child's detriment you've got to stop and look at the situation very clearly.

11 JS: → And you think that the aspects of your second partner's behaviour would not be in

12 your son's interest to witness and be with him?

[12/6/96]



In the extract above we see John formulating the woman's perspective and producing the evaluation (line 11) that it would not be in her son's interest to be with him. This is an accurate summary of the women's position, but the woman's right to the floor has been carefully selected and the evaluation of the narrative reinforced in view of the next speaker. After this formulation John gives the floor to a woman who believes that all fathers have a right to see their children regardless of any circumstances, which is subsequently reinforced by an expert, the Chair of Parent Contact Centres. Therefore, formulations of the lay narrative by the host can assist in summarising their contribution quite accurately but in doing so can also help to reinforce the point of tension which is about to be passed to an opposing speaker. Such, formulations in the talk shows help sustain debate and argument.

According to Heritage, in the news interview there is a type of formulation which he terms the 'inferentially elaborative probe' which is used by the interviewer to "commit the interviewee to a stronger (and more newsworthy) version of his position [...] than he was initially prepared to adopt" (1985:110). In the next example, we can see Kilroy performing such an action with a Labour MP:

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | MP:  | Right, now I'm saying a number of things. I'm saying that it was <u>not</u> their        |
| 2 |      | expectation that they would have to dispossess mainly daughters (.) caring relatives     |
| 3 |      | many of whom gave up the prospect of marriage or a career or both to look after an       |
| 4 |      | elderly mother or father or <u>both</u> and whose reward for that now is to be told that |
| 5 |      | they've lost the home that they expected to inherit, now [ ( )                           |
| 6 | K: → | [ So <u>your</u> answer to my  |

7 question is yes the low-paid- the low-paid in your constituency should pay for my  
8 children to inherit my home that's the answer you've just given me.

[14/5/96]

Here Kilroy has clearly re-produced the MP's answer in a much more contentious fashion and in such a way that reinforces his own position as defender of the common person. This is reminiscent of what one might expect in the news interview whereby the more 'newsworthy' topic is produced for the overhearing audience. The talk show however provides a further twist to this function, since rarely would the host produce such a formulation for the present interlocutor's response. Rather, it is produced to be passed to another speaker, in this case, the 'ordinary' taxpayer. The production of 'newsworthiness' is no doubt one function of this mediated action for the overhearing audience. In the talk show, however, it is to assist in the production of dramatic tension for the audience at home.

The power to formulate the narrative of a speaker is also extended to the lay narrative. This can even mean 're' formulating the narrative completely in terms of the framing already set out by the scripting of the programme.

[PW= petrol station worker, B= Bertram, neighborhood watch co-ordinator]

1 PW: Well really I was robbed at gunpoint three consecutive times .hh and when I asked  
2 one of the police er why it took thirty five minutes for them to travel ( ? ) about  
3 half a mile from the police station to the petrol station where I was working I was  
4 told well this is in Salford sticks if there's a chap that can come here nine times out  
5 of ten he's gonna have a gun if we turn up very quickly =

6 K: = Salford near Manchester=  
7 PW: =Yes, that's right erm, they're gonna shoot at us so we're gonna hang  
8 back n take the evidence of the video camera and  
9 B: heh, heh, heh  
10 K: That's not funny Bertram heh,heh,heh  
11 B: No, I'm horrified to think that that was the case I thought they'd get there very  
12 quickly  
13 PW: Well, you've gotta take their point of view as well I -I  
14 K: → = You mean the police don't get there quickly enough  
15 PW: → That's true  
16 K: They don't take it seriously enough or they don't or are afraid  
17 PW: → No, it's not that, think about it a minute you've got a policeman possibly married  
18 → with children he's in there in the front line so to speak a::ll the time okay now (.) its  
19 gonna be natural to hang on a second I wanna see my kids tomorrow I'm just gonna  
20 hang back just that five minutes just to let them get out of the way=  
21 K: =Ali, it seems to be just from the three things we've heard now that the police seem  
22 → to do what seems to be - here they won't go to deal with the estate with the petrol  
23 bombers and th- th- the thugs terrorizing a hh young innocent family they won't a-  
24 deal with a man with a gun hh but they'll go to the nice safe e- estate which is  
25 patrolled by people like Bertram to deal with a scratched car. Do the police do  
26 enough to protect us?

[15/5/96]

At line 14, Kilroy produces a co-operative formulation of the gist of the petrol station worker's prior narrative. However, the worker has already embarked on a statement suggesting that he has some sympathy with the police (line 13, 'well you've gotta take their point of view') which Kilroy interrupts with his formulation. Unwilling to accept the



worker's progression, Kilroy again reformulates the statement into 'they don't take us seriously enough or are afraid' (line 16). This is clearly not how the worker wanted his assertion to be evaluated as he makes a straight-forward denial of Kilroy's presentation of his point of view (line 17). The man eventually frames his narrative in terms of support for the police but this direction is not allowed to play any further part in the course of the programming. When Kilroy subsequently summarizes the last three lay narratives for the expert Ali (Inspector Ali Dezai of Thames Valley Police) this particular contribution is merely represented as 'they won't deal with a man with a gun' (line 27) and delivered to the expert as support for Kilroy's initial agenda (which began with Michelle) of 'do the police do enough to protect us?'

Despite the evidence that a good proportion of the programme is given over to the narratives of ordinary people, it is not the case that these narratives are produced freely or that lay people develop the narratives and agendas for the programme in their own way. Rather, through the framing of question/answer sequences and the careful formulating of what has been said by the host, television's 'double articulation' therefore means that these devices are used to maximise dramatic tension for the audience at home.

The key point in these strategies is that pre-determined agendas are designed to heighten contentious issues. The host's management of lay narratives is therefore about prioritizing televisuality - ensuring that 'life-world' experiences are reinforced as potential points of conflict. Periods of argument occur therefore when the contentious topic is handed over for response from the experts. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) suggest that the tension is inherent

within the challenge presented to expert discourses by anecdotal evidence authenticated by 'real' experience. Whilst this may be partly true, it does not explain the role of the host in the mediation of expert and lay discourses. However, when Hutchby (1996) discusses the pursuit of conflict in talk radio, his analysis of the interactional strategies at work provides an understanding of the ways in which the host can wield institutional power. In these talk shows, the tension between expert/public and lay/private discourses is exacerbated by the management strategy employed by the host.

The difference between the host's management of the experts' space to talk and his management of the lay narratives is marked. Lay narratives are generally produced with the host sitting close to the speakers, encouraging and clarifying their narratives. John Stapleton often sits down on a step next to the lay speaker and visibly comforts them when they are in distress. The host's acknowledgement of their 'pain' assists in the authentication of the lay narrative:

- 1        M:            ...I had a complete nervous breakdown and I've been in and out of psychiatric  
2                        hospitals ever since and I've erm tried several times to commit suicide because to  
3                        me it's like I have buried my daughter, it's the only way I can cope cos I know I will  
4                        never see her again. I've tried everything, I've tried private detectives, I've tried  
5                        South African high commission and still nothing.
- 6        JS:        →        I know it's- I can see just by looking at you as well as listening to you, it's causing  
7                        you immense distress.

[12/6/96]

Often Kilroy guards lay participants' rights to tell a story through interjections such as, 'listen' and 'let her speak'. The experts on the other hand must fend for themselves and the hosts almost never align themselves with experts by physically sitting next to them. Experts are rarely given long periods of time in which to explain their point of view and are frequently interrupted by the host. Most interruptions of experts are aggressive<sup>13</sup> and the reason for this is mainly due the fact that the primacy of the lay narrative has already been established before passing the formulated problems to the experts. Experts are therefore called to respond to contentious issues previously raised by lay speakers as in *TTTP's* sterilisation debate:

1        JS:            Let me ask George [gynaecologist] before we go any further. I mean these people  
2                        gasped, I:: gasped when I heard this story right I mean can you envisage any  
3                        circumstances in which- I mean what's the procedure, surely, surely people in  
4                        hospital check whether someone's pregnant before they do an operation?

[20/5/96]

After John had helped the women tell the narrative that he demonstrated considerable prior knowledge of, he presents it to the expert in horror. Hosts often take on this role as the intermediary between lay narratives and experts. What occurs when the experts are called to respond is interesting. The experts can only respond in keeping with their institutional persona and policy in an 'animator' footing (Goffman,1981). Thus their explanations seem inadequate to the personal, 'authored' accounts of the 'real' 'life-world' experiences that have been presented by lay participants.

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<sup>13</sup> In this case I refer to interruptions that are power-related and marked by aggressive interjections rather than interruptions that can be understood as neutral or rapport-orientated. (Goldberg,1990)





So far, George, addressing the host, answers the question with a lengthy description of procedures in hospital (line 5 onwards). This is in keeping with his institutional footing as a gynaecologist, rather than addressing what might have gone wrong in this particular case. His use of 'you' is a generic use and does not address the woman who told the story in particular. This is typical of the news interview where interviewees prefer not to address the co-interviewee in order to avoid direct conflict.<sup>14</sup> John interrupts with a direct challenge to the experts description of the procedures (line 12). The place the interruption occurs, could possibly be John anticipating the end of a turn-constructual unit, and therefore could be a neutral interruption, but the expert had already added 'and' which John ignores in continuing with his challenge, which suggests on the other hand that his interruption is aggressive. What is interesting here is that John's interruption is based upon his experience with real women on his show. As the expert continues, still on his institutional footing, John aggressively interrupts again (line 20), this time to press the gynaecologist on his opinion of the specific case in the studio. The phrase 'hand on heart', is possibly an appeal to the gynaecologist to shift from his professional footing to a more 'authentic' and 'authored', subjective response to the issue. George eventually addresses the specific case:

22     G:           Well, I think it's very sad and it is very unfortunate what's happened to you and  
23                   furthermore your G.P. kept saying that there's another condition other than you  
24                   might be pregnant, whether it could have been picked up at the beginning it's  
25                   difficult to say it's always easy retrospectively but it's a difficult case.

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<sup>14</sup> In Greatbatch (1992) he describes the way in which interviewees maintain their institutional footing by directing their talk not to the co-interviewee but to the interviewer. Disagreement is strengthened if the interviewee breaks with this expectation to direct their talk to the co-interviewee.

26 W: I was two months pregnant, that was over seven weeks.

27 G: → You see its very difficult for me to comment on the history you gave to you G.P.

[20/5/96]

The gynaecologist eventually addresses the woman, but is careful about what he might say professionally. When the woman begins to speak to him directly, not through the mediation of the host, the gynaecologist closes down the interaction, 'you see it's very difficult for me to comment' thereby avoiding direct conflict. Interruptions by the host largely occur when there is conflict between the expert's animated 'footing' as an institutional representative and the pressure in the talk show to discuss the authored *real* stories of individuals.

Here is an example where Kilroy refuses to let the expert respond to the lay narrative on an institutional footing. (Kilroy possibly displays more determined pursuit of experts in this respect.) In this extract a woman has just told an emotive story about being arrested with her three-year old son and locked in a police cell. The woman is very distressed and Kilroy displays a good deal of caring and sensitivity in helping elicit her story. The host comforts the woman and holds her hand at points where she is visibly upset. (This takes place on camera as it is part of the liveness and immediacy of the event.)

[W=woman, C=Chris Waterton, Chairman of Local Police Authorities]

1 W: I was knocking at the door begging them please .hh can I have a glass of wa:ter after  
2 fifteen minutes on of the police officers .hh

3 K: you were put in a police ce ll w- w- with your three and a half year old son you were  
4 locked in=

5 W: =cell yes with my hh=



6 K: =you were locked in the police cell

7 W: .hh I was locked in a police cell

8 K: Just the two of you

9 W: Just the two of us

10 K: Stop the:re (.) What's goin on Chris?

11 C: Well obviously [this is a very anxious situation

12 K: → [This isn't right

13 K: Its a what situation!

14 C: A very anxious situat [ion-

15 K: → [Its a scandal!

16 C: Well hh l-lets understand this [hh the officer, the officer at the time (.) may or

17 K: → [Its not anxious its a scandal you don't put

18 C: =may-

19 K: a mother and a three and a half year old son in a police cell we don't put sixteen year

20 olds in police cells fourteen year olds in police cells

21 C: I'm not condoning bad beha:viour but lets underst: [and what's happened-

22 K: → [this is bad behavior

23 is this bad behavior?

24 C: → a- it is bad behavior ye::s=

25 K: =it is bad behavior

In this extract, Kilroy attends to the woman and her narrative sympathetically, formulating the points of issue for the expert. However the expert, Chris, provides an institutional response that is not satisfactory, and Kilroy aggressively interrupts at lines 12, 15, 17 and 22. In line 15, Chris's description of the events as an 'anxious situation' is formulated by K in a much more hostile manner - 'it's a scandal'. Chris then begins to embark upon a defence of hypothetical officers, but again this is not satisfactory as Kilroy presses the



Here, the expert, Ali, embarks on a defence of the police's position by suggesting that there is a wider picture. Such a 'wider' picture is unacceptable, as it does not deal with the injustice experienced by *this* particular woman. (Using figures or percentages is popular in institutional discourse and particularly unpopular on talk shows due to the primacy of narrative forms.) All Kilroy's interruptions occur at moments which can be interpreted as aggressive, insisting that the expert address this individual case. Ali maintains his institutional footing by not responding to the specific example. However, in having to address the problem of errors, he does eventually produce the turn 'we don't always get it right' (lines 16-17).

Dramatic rows can occur at these points in the process where experts' institutional responses do not address lay narratives specifically on their common-sense terms. Experts are often interrupted by other lay speakers because, unlike the host's 'hero-like' protection of the lay speaker, he rarely defends the expert's right to the floor. Under constant pressure from interruptions to respond to the lay narrative on its own terms, one possible solution, other than an admission of guilt as above, is for the expert to interact with the lay participant in a direct way. This usually involves the expert relinquishing their institutional footing. Greatbatch suggests in the case of disagreements in news interviews:

The strength of disagreements is determined in large part by the extent to which speakers opt to maintain or step out of their institutionalized footing in producing them. (1992:287)



In this example, a man begins to relate his experience of the police provoking a riot at a demonstration:

[M=Man at demonstration, MP= John Townsend Conservative MP for Bridlington.]

- 1 M: ... and we had a li:ne of riot police come and move us along (.) and we were
- 2 saying to them 'look calm down this is gonna provoke a riot and they just didn't
- 3 look at us in anyway like we were human be [ings they looked at us as
- 4 MP: → [the police have a right to
- 5 M: as if we were scu:m
- 6 MP: to keep the: roads and our streets open for pe [ople who wanna go about their
- 7 M: [Do they have a right to provoke
- 8 MP: own business and if the- if the- of they- if they if the police-
- 9 M: a riot Mister Townsend do they have a right to provoke a ri [ot-
- 10 MP: → [No, really who provoked
- 11 the riot who riot[ed
- 12 M: [they did!
- 13 MP: → They didn't riot, YOU riot [ed
- 14 M: [Yes they did (.) I- I- rioted I: was a steward trying to
- 15 keep the dem [o peaceful
- 16 MP: → [b-but you said they provoked a riot the [police weren't rioting
- 17 M: [they steamed into a crowd of
- 18 peaceful [people what do you expect?
- 19 MP: → [But who was rioting who was rioting
- 20 M: The poli::[:ce
- 21 MP: [The police were riot [ing?
- 22 M: [Did you see the police charge into Hyde
- 23 Pa [rk in a crowd of women and children?

24 MP: → [THAT'S not a riot (.) THAT'S NOT A RIOT.

[an argument ensues which allows multiple interjections from the studio audience and for a short period of time is clearly beyond the host's control]

Despite originally producing a turn that attempts to address a general issue about the police's role in keeping the peace (lines 4, 6 and 8), the MP switches his footing to take on the actual issue at hand. This is where most arguments (and televisual dramatic moments) take place - when the expert succumbs to the pressure to address *real* world experiences and steps out of his/her institutional footing to interrogate the terms of the 'lay' narrative. The MP begins to challenge the man's account of who instigated the riot by suggesting, 'No, really who rioted?' (line 10). In so doing, the MP is making the most extreme move in terms of relinquishing his institutional footing and abandoning the rules of formal political debate. He even directly contradicts the man's version of events by suggesting, 'They didn't riot, YOU rioted!'. This accusation leads to dramatic conflict as other lay members contribute by rebuking the MP. Kilroy's intervention in this dispute is somewhat dilatory as this presents, arguably, the desired 'televisual' moment.

In the talk show scenario, the expert's direct challenging of his co-interviewee is particularly meaningful because of the privilege already afforded to the 'lay' narrative by the host. Therefore, when the MP declares, 'you rioted', he is questioning the 'truth value' of the man's version of events where the 'truth' of 'life-world' experiences is never questioned by the hosts. In instances such as this, therefore, the expert is challenging the conventional wisdom of the talk show framework - the primacy of the 'real' event. Personal experience is

the talk show's generic epistemology (Livingstone and Lunt 1994) and so to question the truth value of the 'authentic' provokes most conflict and arguably most 'televisuality'.

The examples above demonstrate that the primacy of lay experience is achieved through the management of the turn-taking in talk show discourse. They also suggest that the debate is designed to maximize conflict and thus enhance televisuality. It is not simply that the discourses of ordinary people and their 'life-worlds' emerge as naturally oppositional to the discourses of institutional representatives, but that the careful management and construction of the discourse makes such heated debate inevitable. Experts' institutional footings are continually tested and the pressure to address issues in terms of 'lay' common sense discourse leads to the intensification of conflict. Taking issue with the already authenticated lay narrative in terms of 'truth value' is the ultimate point of tension in the drama that unfolds.

### **5.2.3 The evolution of debate on *Vanessa***

As discussed earlier, *Vanessa* offers a different sub-genre of the talk show that is representative of the therapy genre. There are no experts on *Vanessa* and the dramatic tension is created differently. 'Guests' have already been selected and are introduced by *Vanessa*, usually one-by-one as having a specific story to tell. The process usually begins with *Vanessa*, like Kilroy and John Stapleton, helping 'ordinary' guests to produce their narrative. However, *Vanessa* displays an even greater knowledge of her guests than in the public issue format:



[V= Vanessa, M = Marissa]

- 1        V:                We haven't established a picture of what you're like towards your boyfriend. You  
2                            phone him on everage, how many times a day?
- 3        M:                Four
- 4        V:                I heard it was eight
- 5        M:                Yeh, well, heh, heh, four to eight
- 6        V:                You phone his mother to check up where he is. You follow him when he goes out in  
7                            the evening. Tell me about that birthday evening, it was his birthday wasn't it?  
8                            His birthday this year...

[16/1/96]

It is obvious here, more so than in the other two talk shows, that control of the narrative belongs to the host. Vanessa even directly challenges the accuracy of Marissa's statement. Here Vanessa is evoking the parts of experience that she wants Marissa to tell, in the interests of stressing the extent of her jealousy. Since there are no experts, this is drawn out for the studio audience who, I would argue, take the experts' place. Their ability to give advice is based upon their own 'common-sense'. Members of the studio audience then put themselves forward, possibly even removing themselves from their seat to a constructed platform, where they give their opinion or advice based upon what they have just heard.

Speakers from the floor rarely adopt a detached 'animator' footing, like the expert, rather their right to speak is based upon personal experience. This was one woman's response to Marissa:

[W=woman]

- 1        W:            yeh, well your situation is exactly the same as mine was two and a half years ago an'  
2                    believe you me I never showed my jealousy and in the end I exploded. I lost that  
3                    man, I lost him and believe you me you are both very insecure people. I::'ve now (.)  
4                    got friends who have spoken to me and said to me he's not worth having you're  
5                    worth more than him [...] and in the end they're not worth having guys like that and  
6                    I now realise, I'm worth more than that.

[audience applause]

[16/1/96]

Here the women does not actually address Marissa's problem, although she does speak to her directly. Rather, her own narrative takes over. In another example one woman utilises her experience of having been subjected to domestic abuse, as the 'expert status' from which she can challenge the 'guest' speaker:

[W=woman]

- 1        W            Have you had any psychiatric help or even asked for any because you certainly need  
2                    it. I was married to a man like you for eighteen years and he gave me so many  
3                    injuries, you need help now not later before you kill somebody.

[16/1/96]

Because, members of the studio speak to the 'guests' on the same footing they are much more likely to engage in direct conflict. For instance in this discussion about female bouncers:





### **Conclusion - morning talk and its construction as a gossip genre.**

The programmes I discuss here have different formats and their topics and contents shift and change through their daily repetition. However, what endures throughout the morning are the para-social appeals to lived reality. Therefore, with reference to the more flexible concept of genre that I have been working with, I would suggest that morning talk programmes share a similar focus, or 'orientation' (Neale, 1981). I would argue that these texts are commonly orientated through their emphases upon the relational and experiential which accords with styles of speech associated with 'feminine' modes of gossip (Chapter Two). Here I will compare these strategies of the magazine programme and the talk show, as detailed above, to characteristics that have been attributed to gossip as a feminine speech genre. Although I have argued in Chapter Two that much of the literature on gossip has not outlined a formal generic structure, the closest one can find to set of generic rules is that described by Jones (1980) in 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture'. I will use this essay as the point of contact with which to order and summarise these discursive features that I have detailed in this chapter.

Jones describes the elements of gossip following a sociolinguistic approach presented by Ervin-Tripp as a 'verbal framework' which is studied, "in terms of the relations between the setting, the participants, the topic, the functions of an interaction, the form and the values held by the participants about each of these" (Ervin-Tripp, 1964<sup>15</sup>, cited in Jones 1980:195).

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<sup>15</sup> See Ervin-Tripp, S. (1964) An Analysis of the Interaction of Language, Topic, and Listener. *American Anthropologist*, 66 (6:part2), pp.86-102.

I will consider each of these elements and the relationship between gossip and these shows, in turn.

### *Setting*

Setting refers to both time and place and the more general sense of cultural situation.

According to Jones, for gossip: "The private, the personal domain - this is the cultural setting. In concrete terms, the setting is the house, the hairdressers', the supermarket: locales associated with the female role both at home and outside it" (1980:195). I have described the obvious ways in which the studio space created in the morning magazine programme simulates a domestic setting through familiar surroundings of the home, but also at some segments it exactly reproduces both the hairdressers and the supermarket with spaces for the resident hairdresser and the various consumer experts. The talk show does not conform to these physical locales in such a straight-forward way, but it does help reproduce the more general cultural setting of the private and the personal. Both kinds of shows foreground personal experience and private discussion, which is constructed through various strategies, as we have seen, and can be summarised more accurately in relation to the other elements of gossip.

### *Participants*

Under this category, Jones suggests that, "Gossip is essentially talk between women in our common role *as* women. Gossip is a language of intimacy [...] an intimacy arising from the solidarity and identity of women as members of a social group with a pool of common experience" (1980:195). The programmes present interesting relevant strategies here.

Firstly, both kinds of programming assume a (female) audience community which shares common experiences. For instance, the 'implicatures' which refer to assumed shared 'feminine' knowledges (such as recourse to the soap opera), but also the talk shows' specific assumptions of shared experiences, 'would you let your child?'...'would you have a mastectomy?' These are assumptions about women's subjectivities in their traditional roles *as* women: mothers, wives, daughters. Recall Judy Finnegan's opening to the show in one of the examples from *This Morning*, 'you loving wives, girlfriends and mums' [7/7/98].

These strategies help to constitute an ideal shared experience of 'Mrs Daytime-Consumer' that continually reasserts women's position within the private sphere. However, there is also another 'sharing of experience' within the specific mediation of the discourse. This refers to the co-temporal and co-spatial orientations that are embedded with the texts. The texts present the simultaneous sharing of experiences that are happening 'here and now'.

Allowing the viewer access to a text in production, privy to errors and misjudgements, not only breaks the spell of spectacle, but also assists in the creation of a shared intimacy.

Across the constructed space of broadcasting, through deictic references and camera angles, the suggestion is one of a mutually unfolding experience between the studio and the home.

### *Topic*

According to Jones, topics for gossip are always about the roles involved in the 'occupation' of being a women, as discussed above, but, whatever the specific topic, she suggests that its relevance is always related to the personal. In both the morning magazine



show and the talk show I describe the importance of the 'authored' voice (Goffman,1981) in speaking directly, unaffected, from personal experience. In the morning magazine show, the structure of its 'chat' means that both presenters' and guests' discourses are framed in this way. In the talk show, I argued that the points of the dramatic spectacle appear through the pursuit of the 'authored' voice: through the hosts' defence and support of the lay narrative, the hosts' pursuit of conflict through the 'experts' relinquishment of an institutional footing, or simply through the validation of the right to speak by personal experience, 'this happened to me'.

### *Functions*

Jones describes four functions at work in gossip, 'house-talk', 'scandal', 'bitching' and 'chatting'. 'House-talk' obviously refers to the domestic issues which connect women's lives and is replayed in the topics on the morning magazine programme as well as, to a lesser extent, on the talk shows. 'Scandal' refers to the moral judgement of the behaviour of others and is possibly most visible on the talk show, especially on *Vanessa* which creates dramatic tension through 'lay' judgements upon the participators on the stage. This possibly also relates to Jones' suggestion of the cathartic category of 'bitching'.

The most interesting function here is 'chatting', which Jones describes as "the most intimate form of gossip, a mutual self-disclosure" (op.cit.:197). I have described the way in which these programmes assume a 'sociable' conversational style which is both personable and intimate. It involves the mutual self-disclosure of both presenters and lay participators in the studio. However, this reciprocity, that is characteristic of gossip, is also here a

particularly mediated phenomenon. The para-social appeals to participate also imply the self-disclosure of the viewer at home. In the magazine programme we are encouraged to phone-in and in the talk show we are encouraged to understand ourselves as participants during the viewing experience as well as for future shows. The constant direct appeals to locate our own experience within the personal issue being discussed in the studio, encourages a 'para-social' self-disclosure for home audience members, across the broadcast medium.

Finally, Jones suggests that all these forms are criteria founded upon women's everyday lives and I have shown how the quotidian is reinforced in these programmes through daily inferences to what's happening 'now'. This mediated 'dailiness' potentially embeds these personal discourses within the daily experience of the home. The creation of an intimate shared community is not simply one played out upon the screen, but one which utilises these strategies to suggest the erosion of a distinction between text and spectator, implying a reciprocity that includes viewers at home as also *participators* in the broadcast space.

This presents an intriguing phenomenon at the interface of public/private spheres as Meyrowitz (1985) suggests (Chapter Four). Private and intimate self-disclosure is mediated by television as entertainment, but whilst it is at once transformed as public dramatic spectacle, it is also 're-embedded' within lived local contexts of the home. It remains then to assess how these televised strategies are encountered in the daily experience of women's lives and in the next chapter I set out a methodological framework for researching the gendered para-social relationship which these texts construct. The apparent staging of the

closing of the spectator/spectacle distance, the appeals to participate and the defence of the lay narrative are all part of the talk's emphasis upon relational, contextual experience that is the backbone of what, more popularly, we might call gossip.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Developing a Methodology for Audience Research into Para-social Interaction**

#### **Introduction.**

In the preceding chapter I analysed morning talk based texts in terms of their 'communicative intentionality' - that is their strategies of embedding themselves into a communicative framework of the everyday, the routine and the personal. I argued that these programmes draw upon 'para-social' imperatives that suggest reciprocity with their audience, and I argued that much of this address is gendered. However, despite research into broadcast talk utilising the concept of the 'para-social', at the time of this research there are no similar studies which assess how this might impact upon the viewer at home. In this chapter therefore, I set out a methodological framework for researching the particular matrix that I have become interested in. That is the gendered construction of talk and its communicative relationship with a female audience.

This chapter will assess existing methods of audience research and find a space whereby audience research can be adapted to make 'communication' the central focus of the research initiative. Therefore, I would describe my methodological approach as eclectic, bringing together methods from media audience research as well as linguistic approaches to language both of which are carried out with regard to feminist ethics in research. Initially I outline research into 'para-social' interaction which has been carried out within the uses and gratifications paradigm of media research, and then turn to the well-established methods of

cultural studies' approaches to audience research, making suggestions to bridge the text/audience dichotomy, outlined in Chapter One. In the final sections of this chapter, I will detail the practical stages in carrying out the audience research and introduce the group of women involved in the study.

### **6.1 Uses and gratifications - the 'para-social interaction scale'**

Although the concept of para-social interaction has received almost no attention in cultural studies approaches to audience research, there is an area of 'uses and gratifications' research which has developed a method of research into what it refers to as 'para-social interaction' (PSI). Uses and gratifications research, which re-emerged in the 1970s,<sup>1</sup> is generally credited with playing a part in shifting the balance of concerns about media 'effects'. In the older 'effects' based tradition, concern was focused on the possible negative behavioural influences that the media imposed upon the 'masses', whilst instead uses and gratifications tended to ask 'what people do with the media' rather than 'what the media do with people' (Halloran, 1970). This kind of research takes a functionalist approach that suggests that media use depends on the perceived satisfactions, needs, wishes or motives of the prospective audience. Katz et. al. (1974) in their essay 'Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual', suggest that 'uses and gratifications' emphasises:

(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) *needs*, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need *gratifications* and (6) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (Katz et. al., 1974:p20)

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<sup>1</sup> Its origins are traceable to the 1940s (Moore, 1993).

Uses and gratifications theory therefore assesses the ways in which the audience is active and 'goal-directed' in its use of media to gratify its social and psychological needs that are then understood by researchers as both individualistic and behaviouristic.

Within this framework, a burgeoning body of research into PSI has emerged. In 1972 Rosengren and Windahl suggested that social interaction was a basic need which fosters mass media use and para-social interaction. Although they too take their direction from Horton and Wohl's (1956) early essay on para-social interaction, they assume a different direction to that taken by those interested in the strategies of language use and textual form (the research tradition referred to as 'broadcast talk' in Chapter Four). In keeping with the uses and gratifications tradition, Rosengren and Windahl suggest that para-social interaction through media forms fulfills a psychological and social need for interaction. They argue that:

a person's reliance upon a mass medium for need fulfillment and the availability of functional alternatives are related negatively. As the perceived number of functional alternatives decreases, the more reliant a person is upon a mass medium for the fulfillment of basic needs" (cited in Rubin, Perse and Powell, 1985:159).

On this basis, Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) empirically tested individuals' need for investment in para-social interaction as related to a lack of other social resources. Their experiment attempted to correlate 'loneliness' and para-social interaction via three hundred and twenty-nine questionnaires on viewing local news. The study was carried out with



college students whose average age was 26, 62% of whom were female. Their 'loneliness' was measured using Russell et. al.'s (1980) Loneliness Scale [LONELY]<sup>2</sup>, whereby the subjects were asked their sentiments about 20 options which they should rate from 1 (always) to 5 (never). The statements they rated included, 'I feel in tune with the people around me', 'I lack companionship' or 'I feel isolated from others'. This is a typical psychological experiment scale and a similar scale was developed to assess para-social interaction. Viewers were asked to respond to 20 items about their involvement with local television news, such as 'The news program shows me what the newscasters are like', 'I look forward to hearing my favorite newscaster on tonight's news and, 'I sometimes make remarks to my favourite newscaster during the newscast.' (Rubin, Perse and Powell, 1985)

However, the authors found that there was no positive correlation between loneliness and para-social interaction with a favourite news personality. They state that, "the operationalization of the felt need for social interaction had little bearing upon the perception by an audience with a local television news personality" (1985:168). The mean scores for the above scales are almost all between 2 and 3 out of their 1-5 scale.

This does not mean, however, that they have not entirely disproved a link between para-social interaction and loneliness. Their incorporation of a 'TV reliance when lonely' scale, claims a relationship with para-social interaction. They qualify their results, "although not substantial, there was some limited indication, then, that para-social interaction was related more to the reliance on television when loneliness was experienced than to the use of

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, D., Peplau, L.A., Cutrona, C.E., (1980) 'The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 472-480.

interpersonal communication channels" (1985:169). Therefore, I assume that their results imply that although there is no relationship with loneliness and para-social interaction per se, there is a relationship between those who rely on TV when lonely and para-social interaction. This seems rather inconclusive. The authors seemingly must admit limited success in looking for such a correlation, however, they find a loophole by suggesting that past (uses and gratifications) research has found television watching for companionship motivation "to be related more to the game show and daytime serial viewing than to news viewing" (1985:173).

I describe this particular research experiment, from which there have followed other studies into psychometric correlations of para-social interaction (including: Rubin and Perse, 1987; Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Perse, 1990; Alperstein, 1991 and Auter, 1993) so as to provide an account of the methodological ground which I reject for this study. My reservations mostly echo the kinds of observations made by scholars in the cultural studies tradition of uses and gratifications research in general. Elliott (1974) argues that uses and gratifications research is overly empiricist and lacks a prior social theory. In the case of the PSI scale I find it difficult to comprehend exactly how one can 'measure' para-social interaction.

Furthermore, some of the indicators on the scale seem entirely inappropriate such as number 19 - 'I find my favorite newscaster to be attractive'. Presumably a score of 5 'strongly agree' would be counted as one of the markers of a greater degree of identification and thus para-social interaction. But, how can physical attractiveness be such a straightforward indicator of 'para-social involvement'? Can we not para-socially interact



with personalities we find unattractive, 'smarmy' or objectionable? The researchers are surely making some sexual assumptions here that do not address the fact that attractiveness is also culturally constructed in the world of television. A number of the indicators on the scale are therefore problematic. Take for example the indicator 13 - 'when my favorite newscaster reports a story, he or she seems to understand the kind of things I want to know'. How are we to understand 'what I want to know' from the news? This depends upon what we have come to expect of news as a genre.

Indeed, genre as a concept plays no part in this analysis despite the authors, at the end of the paper, suggesting that the lack of correlation is possibly because they chose the wrong genre. Their choice does seem curious and requires some reflection on genre. Newscasters subscribe to a journalistic ethic of neutrality and yet one of the PSI indicators is, '3. When my favourite newscaster shows me how he or she feels about the news, it helps me make up my own mind about the story.' If daytime serials or quiz shows offer more potential for para-social interaction then some consideration of the generic construction of these forms is surely necessary. As I demonstrated in Chapter Five, the construction of personality is generically specific and yet the actual generic forms of the media are ignored in this form of audience measurement.

Another of Elliott's objections is that uses and gratifications research is individualistic and has no sense of truly *social* processes. In the example above, the scale of the questionnaire (over 300) is taken to be representative of 'viewers', not socially oriented audiences. In this study 61% of the respondents were women, possibly due to their university recruitment,



and yet this has no apparent significance to the research. Presumably, in this research there are psychological *needs* that are generic to all human beings, which any investigation into social research might challenge.

Ultimately, the focus on *need* raises the most significant objection to this particular study. Elliott suggests that this is too 'mentalistic' in that it emphasizes the mental states of individuals. In the study above, the emphasis was upon a link between loneliness and TV use, assuming that an audience will always look for alternatives to 'real' social interaction through the media. This implies a sense of 'lack', especially given the assumptions based upon generic human need where individuals who rely on TV use are failing in other psychologically significant ways to have meaningful face-to-face social relationships that are then sought to be replaced by the *para* social. Given that I am particularly interested in a female audience, my concern is that this kind of direct correlation, without any substantial social insights, can reduce women's involvement in media use to the suggestion of a surrogate friend employed by those who lack *real* skills in the *real* world. This direction obviously has the potential to dance directly to the tune of those who assume that women, and particularly housewives, are the most duped and naïve of all media users in engaging in forms which remove them from 'lived reality'. As a feminist researcher, I am anxious to make a more meaningful consideration of women's involvement with a specific genre.

The authors of the PSI scale boldly claim that, "the findings of this study provide greater insight about the *nature* of parasocial interaction and audience activity" (Rubin, Perse and

Powell,1985:175 my emphasis). However, it is difficult to gain any understanding of the *nature* of parasocial interaction using this measurement scale without actually considering the contexts and practices of consumption. Instead, I conceive of the viewers in this study as a socially constituted audience and begin to understand their communicative relationship with texts that are para-socially inviting. Whilst I intend to engage with the concept of 'identification', I do not want to understand that identification as some form of compensation which works against forming 'normal' relationships. This uses and gratifications approach seems overly deterministic and negative in its focus on individual need. I want to turn to the tradition of 'audience' research that recognizes the social configuration of media use.

## **6.2 Cultural studies' approaches to media audiences**

Although, cultural studies and uses and gratifications share some common ground in their realisation of the 'active' audience, there are also some striking differences. One of the most significant challenges to uses and gratifications research is that it fails to engage with questions of power. As Moores cautions, "There is also a tendency on the part of gratificationists to overplay 'audience freedom' and ignore issues of ideology completely" (1993:7). In contrast, the breakthroughs made at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1980s took into account the relative power of text and reader in cultural struggles over 'meaning'.

This development was initiated by Hall's (1980) influential 'encoding and decoding' model in which the semiotic construction of meaning from a Marxist perspective is explored in



terms of the encoding of messages in production and the decoding of those messages in reception. For Hall both processes involve structures of meaning. This shifts the emphasis away from the older communication models of 'sender-message- receiver' and into a process whereby, "we must recognize that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange [...] and that the moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding' though only 'relatively autonomous' in relation to the communicative process on the whole are *determinate* moments"(1980:129). In terms of ideological impact, the process of decoding the discursive structure of the message is as central as the process of encoding the structure of the message, in making meaning. Hall points out that these processes may not be symmetrical and here he draws upon the work of Volosinov who, as we have previously discussed stresses the multi-accentuated nature of the sign. Thus, the text becomes open to alternative readings depending upon cultural power and social relations and Hall posits hypothetical situations of decoding which mark out the territory for audience research.

Hall's essay opened the way for a more complex understanding of text-reader relations in media research. It is important to stress here that the *social* subjects implied in Hall's work make use of the symbolic resources around them to decode messages - which is different to the spectator subject which is construed in film theory (see Chapter One). This also follows Eco's work which discussed the viewer's reading of a TV message being dependant upon his/her "general framework of cultural references [...] his ideological, ethical religious standpoints [...] his tastes, his value systems etc." (1972:115).



Morley (1980) was the first to empirically test Hall's hypothetical decoding positions within audience research. He attempted to assess the ways in which audience members were incorporated into the dominant paradigm or resisted the dominant ideology according to their social position. He proposed that:

What is needed is an approach which links differential interpretations back to the socio-economic structure of society - showing how members of different groups and classes, sharing different cultural codes, will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal/idiosyncratic level, but in a way systematically related to their socio-economic position. (1980:88)

His investigation of different socially oriented audience responses to *Nationwide* (a tea-time current affairs programme) supported Hall's hypothesis since groups of managers generally produced a dominant coding, shop-stewards a radical oppositional response to the message, whilst trade-union officials recorded a more negotiated position. In groups of students there were even more pronounced differences in readings with black further education students adopting marked oppositional positions. Therefore, Morley's early study demonstrated how complex readings of the media can depend upon the social and cultural backgrounds of the viewers.

This study has generally been heralded as a landmark in cultural studies research which proved relationships between ideological readings and social positions. Many other studies have followed in this tradition utilizing the encoding-decoding paradigm. Seiter (1999) considers three such studies: Corner et al's (1990) *Nuclear Reactions* which focuses on readings of programming on nuclear power, Jhally and Lewis's (1992) *Enlightened Racism*

on reception of the *Cosby Show* and Schlesinger et al's *Women Viewing Violence*. All of these studies reveal group readings of material shown in an institutional context - usually the university department. Consideration of each of these studies leads Seiter (1999) to suggest that "the 'encoding-decoding model' seems to work better for news and non-fiction programming than it does for entertainment programming, where it is much more difficult to identify a single message, or even a set of propositions with which audience members could agree or disagree" (1999:20/21). Similarly, I have argued in Chapter Three, that it is difficult to find overarching ideological meaning in talk-based programming.

Despite Morley's early work being generally acknowledged as leading the way for research that takes into account the social dynamics of the audience, he does make clear some of the problems that were inherent in his early method. The problem that most concerns Morley is the issue of context. Decoding does not 'naturally' occur in the institutional context, television viewing usually takes place in the domestic environment, influenced by family members or cohabitants. This insight led to a change in direction in some audience studies to focus upon the domestic conditions of media consumption. Such research drew its methodological apparatus from 'ethnographic' approaches which became central to the work of the Birmingham C.C.C.S.:

Historically, ethnographic work has arisen from an awareness of the benefits of personal participation in, and communication with, an integral group involved with a characteristic way of life or cultural form. Developed intensively to tackle the problems of studying 'alien' cultures, ethnographic studies have come to be used more and more as a tool of mainstream sociological investigation. (1980:73)

This approach involved spending time with informants in their local environments and homes, carrying out 'participant observation' and usually semi or unstructured interviews. Key examples of ethnographic media research included Hobson's (1980) research into young mothers' use of the media in the home, Lull's (1980, 1990) expansive study involving the observation of over 200 family households,<sup>3</sup> and also Morley's (1986) follow up study *Family Television*.

Other research, which I drew attention to in Chapter One, has followed and has been considerably influenced by feminist researchers interested in the politics of the domestic sphere, for instance Ann Gray's (1992) *Video Playtime*, in which she identified not only gender differences in the genre choices of video rentals, but also insights into the way in which the VCR has become incorporated into family dynamics. She interprets the women's reluctance to programme the VCR not straightforwardly as a weakness (they were all more than able to programme the washing machine for instance) but that the dynamics of the home suggested that this was actually a resistive strategy in which they could avoid adding another chore to their list of responsibilities in the household. Other studies, following this trend to turn to the site of consumption, apply a sociologically grounded consideration of technological appropriation in the domestic environment, most notably Silverstone and Hirsch (1992).

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<sup>3</sup> This work was carried out in the States and is thought to bridge some territory with uses and gratifications research. Although it is ethnographic, it does not engage directly with questions of power that informs the C.C.C.S work. For instance Lull does not interpret his findings about family hierarchies in terms of the wider political system of patriarchy as Hobson does.



### 6.3 Texts, readers, contexts

So far, in this chapter, I have summarized the dominant directions of cultural studies' audience research that largely involves a triumvirate of concerns around texts, readers and the contexts of consumption. The debate here becomes interesting for my thesis since I am not concerned entirely with any *one* of these dimensions alone. In considering the historical progression of audience research over the years, Moores (1990) argues that the field has shifted through concerns for each of these three elements. Similarly, Brunsdon (1992) argues that there has been a seismic shift that dispersed the consideration of the television text into the more varied and diverse text of the audience. Notably this reconfiguration was largely influenced by the contribution of feminist scholars to audience research. The re-evaluation of soap opera led researchers away from the 'bad text' to the 'good audience' in an attempt to validate women's pleasures and practices against the regime of moral argument that continually defined female audiences of 'soap' as passive and naïve. In Brunsdon's view this fails to do justice to the fact that an 'active' audience may only be making the best out of a bad text and this can present a problem where the significance of the text is ignored, or worse still, in the case of soap opera, not considered textually worthy of academic criticism.<sup>4</sup> In conclusion she suggests that, "the recognition of the creativity of the audience, must I think be mobilized back in relation to the television text" (1992:126).

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<sup>4</sup> Brunsdon draws upon Allen's comments in Speaking of Soap Opera (1984:28) where he suggests that soap opera viewers have not been granted the capacity of critical distance from the text.

In this study, I have already presented an analysis of the texts that I am concerned with, but my particular interest is less in pinning down the message itself,<sup>5</sup> but in understanding the programmes' communicative relationship with their audience. This leads me to dissolve the distinction between text and readers as entirely separate entities since I am most interested in how they interact. Moores suggests that, "The time has come to consolidate our theoretical and methodological advances by refusing to see texts, readers and contexts as separable elements and by bringing together ethnographic studies with textual analyses" (1990:24). To some extent this call has been heard by researchers who are increasingly bringing together an analysis of the text with analysis of reception.

For instance, Lyn Thomas' (1995) research on *Inspector Morse* is presented in two parts; an analysis of the text in terms of its gender representation, quality and Englishness, and an analysis of a focus group discussion about the programme in terms of how the discourses identified in the textual analysis are mobilized in the discussion about the text. However, whilst this study does to some extent bring together the *findings* of the textual analysis with those from the audience readings of the text, it does not entirely bring together 'ethnographic' practice with textual form. The audience research still takes place in the education institution and textual analysis and audience research are analytically treated as separate entities. In my research too, I have provided a separate textual analysis but I also want to attempt to find a method of bringing the two together that works towards an 'ethnographic' investigation into the communicative act of watching (or interacting with) television.

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<sup>5</sup> Since I argue that any one message is difficult to find in such polysemic texts.



## 6.4 Moments of television

I have suggested that I want to find a method for removing a clear binary distinction between texts and/or readers to investigate para-social viewing strategies. Fiske (1992) in his essay 'Moments of Television: Neither the Text Nor the Audience', suggests a dissolution of the categories 'text' and 'audience'. Firstly, he argues that the concept of 'audience' is difficult to understand as an empirically accessible 'object' since it is difficult to find its boundaries. For instance, he asks "what on earth is 'not the television audience'?" (1992:56) We are constituted at different moments in time as different members of different audiences.

However, the suggestions that I find most relevant to this study are those about what we think of as 'text'. Increasingly, 'postmodern' textual analyses suggest that (particularly television) texts are open, polysemic, refuting solid definition. The talk show is described in this way (Chapter Three) and I would describe the morning talk programming as such. Many television texts cannot be understood as complete and unitary objects. Ellis' (1982) use of the term 'segmentation' describes the way in which the television text is different to its cinematic relative in that it is broken up into particles which embed themselves in daily experience. This 'incompleteness' has consequences for audience research since it requires something of the viewer - the opening up of syntagmatic gaps for the viewer to 'write' in the connection. Fiske therefore adapts Barthes' theory of the 'writerly text' to invoke a concept of the 'producerly text':

A producerly text does not prescribe either a set of meanings or a set of reader relations for the viewer: instead it delegates the production of meaning to the viewer-producer. It differs however,



from the writerly text in that it is not avant-garde and does not shock the reader-writer into learning new discursive competencies in order to read-write it: rather it offers provocative spaces within which the view can use her or his already developed competencies. (Fiske 1992:63)

In my analysis of morning programmes in Chapter Five, I argued that they appear as though they are in progress and not 'finished'. I also described how they evolve 'now', contemporaneously with daily life, which Fiske suggests facilitates the conditions of the producerly text since this 'liveness' assists in removing a sense of the authority of the author.

Fiske's arguments, therefore, establish these mid-morning talk programmes as ripe for researching in terms of the producerly text. He suggests research should take into account, not so much the text, but the 'textuality' of the viewing experience whereby "the correspondence between subjectivity and textuality is so close that the two leak into each other at every point of contact" (1992:57). It is these 'points of contact' therefore that we need to analyse, where the viewers make sense of their material social existence by bringing the resources of the text to bear upon it. Research, therefore, needs to focus on what Fiske defines as 'moments of television'.

## **6.5 Talking moments**

I am beginning to draw out an argument for audience research that also considers 'moments' of consumption. However, my specific interest in broadcast talk suggests some further nuances to Fiske's position as outlined above. In Chapter Two, I argued for cultural studies to re-instate 'speech' as an important space where the articulation of symbolic

meaning takes place, drawing from the work of Volosinov. However, that is not to suggest that 'talk' has not been thought about within some audience research.

Some scholars describe the way in which oral culture plays a significant role in the circulation of meanings around television's cultural codes (for example, Hobson, 1991; Fiske, 1992; Brown, 1994 and Gillespie, 1995). According to these authors, television promotes gossip and kinship amongst social groupings. For instance, as I mentioned in Chapter One, Mary Ellen Brown (1994) discusses the way in which soap opera in form and content echoes forms of orality that mesh with women's oral culture and helps foster cohesion amongst women. Similarly, Gillespie (1995) provides an interesting account of young British Asians living in Southall talking about the Australian soap *Neighbours* within their peer groups. The soap provides a platform for discussion whereby they can compare and contrast their family lives and kinship networks with those in the fictional world of 'Erinsborough' that also generates discussion about cultural difference significant to the diaspora experience.

These studies therefore exemplify Fiske's observations, since he would suggest that gossip about television forms is part of the nature of the 'producerly' text that makes its consumption meaningful to viewers' lives:

People's talk about television is not just a response to it, but is read back into it: our friend's gossip about a program influences our reading of it (1992:66).

Therefore, investigating people's talk about television with their peer groups gives insights into the way in which social formations - lived realities - are mobilized back into the reading of the text, getting us closer to the meaning of the text for audiences.

This kind of research presents a methodological challenge in so far as it relies on 'naturally occurring' groups of viewers and not those placed together for the purpose of the focus group. However, I would argue that it still does not get us to 'moments' of viewing, at least not in a literal sense. The moment of viewing is essential if we want to understand the communicative nature of the text *in action* with its audience. Therefore, whilst I do intend to listen to my group of interviewees talk *about* the text together, I also want to get a step closer to what Fiske might call 'intertextual relations' - between text and viewer. I want to understand what happens as the women watch the television programme, to observe and pay close attention to the text and the reader coming together in the formation of a 'producerly text'. Therefore, in my audience research, I want to record the process of 'making the text' - in this case to attempt to record the audience's investment in the para-social encounters at the live moment in which they begin to make sense of the programme as it is broadcast. Thus, as with the textual analysis, my audience research does not conform to the encoding/decoding process where symbolic meaning is constructed and deconstructed as a dual process which separately conceived, as is usually conducted in media research. Rather, it will make some progress into capturing and making sense of interactive 'moments' in the reception of broadcasting.



## 6.6 Text to text

This, therefore, leads me to propose therefore an analysis of the TV text alongside the text of consumption. My approach owes a great deal to Walkerdine's (1986) account of family video viewing.<sup>6</sup> Having viewed the film *Rocky II* with the Cole family, she provides a description of the narrative of the film alongside the occurrences in the home. For example:

### *Rocky II*, the video

Fight scene, possibly the 15th  
round.

000

R: (untranscribed)

F: Watch, watch. Cor he ain't half

whacking him, ain't he, Do?

Watch, here.

010

F tells J to go and ask M to make some tea.

J goes to the kitchen. M's friend is with her -

Scottish accent - with her young child.

[...]

125

F pauses video or winds back to the closing round,

because M is handing out the tea and cakes.

Rocky fighting championship  
round, pitched against huge black  
opponent. Things aren't looking  
good. Rocky is taking a beating.

R: Mum, hurry up.

F: You ready?

M: What?

F: We've yet to see the end of this.

The crowd is going wild, cheer-  
ing, shouting.

R: This is the 5th round.  
F: Fifteenth, watch it.

From this example we can visualise the points in the film that Mr Cole marks out as central for the family to engage in and the rest of the transcript enables Walkerdine to see the parallels and sense-making that Mr Cole makes in his identification with the protagonist Rocky. She begins to understand Mr Cole's association of the film within the framework of class struggle: as Rocky must 'fight' for a better social position for his family, so must Mr Cole physically labour for his. Fighting symbolizes "a way of gaining power, of celebrating or turning into a celebration that which is constituent of oppression" (Walkerdine, 1986:182).

I would suggest that Walkerdine's approach enables a mobilisation of the audience response back into an interpretation of the text. For instance, would Walkerdine have got to such a close evaluation of Mr. Cole's identification with Rocky had she not charted the viewing experience in such a way? Had she simply asked Mr. Cole what he thought about the film after the event, is he likely to have articulated such a relationship with the fight scenes that could have been understood in any other way than pleasure in the spectacle of the event?

It is important to remember that when we ask audiences questions about relationships with media forms, 'ordinary' viewers are not necessarily used to critically reflecting upon their

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Walkerdine's central argument in this essay is about her place as observer of the situation. Her subsequent interpretation of the experience involves inserting herself in the text and engaging with her own subjective experience.

viewing experiences in such a way - or interrogating their pleasures and practices in terms of subjective involvements and senses of self. Hermes (1995), in her study of magazine readers, remarks on the way in which magazine reading is actually very non-attentive, casual and not always 'meaningful'. She criticizes Willis et. al. (1990) who suggest that there is no difference between high and popular culture with regard to processes of meaning production:

Although laudable in its intention to reassert the value of low-valued popular culture, there are dire consequences to such an approach: general, everyday media use is identified with attentive and meaningful readings of specific texts, and that is precisely what it is not [...] Media use is not always meaningful or at least a secondary activity. (Hermes, 1995:15)

Hermes makes comparisons between daily magazine reading and daily television use which are useful here since she draws attention to the half-attentive ways in which texts are consumed: "magazines may be opened or leafed through, television sets may be on, but that is hardly an indication that they are 'read' consciously, seriously or with animation" (1995:15). This throws up a crucial methodological point, because when Hermes interviewed her subjects they often had little to say about their experiences of reading women's magazines. Practices embedded in everyday experience are often not much reflected upon and gaining data by asking people to account for their everyday experience can be frustrating and unproductive. This reinforces my intention to place more emphasis on observing the viewing practice itself and presenting the findings in such a way that mirrors Walkerdine's approach, except that in the case of the conversationally oriented text this practice has a greater focus on speech.



## 6.7 Talking texts

Although Walkerdine's study presents me with one of the only examples of displaying the visual text of the home with that of the media text, there are some differences that I should explain here. Firstly, Walkerdine analyses a video text which creates a different viewing environment to that created by the normal flow of television. Secondly, this means that Walkerdine, as a participant, is generally interpreting the physical actions of the family during the viewing experience as part of her ethnographically based study. I am concerned with broadcast texts that flow into the space of the home, constantly employing direct address which cannot be understood as contained, whole texts in the same way that a film operates. I am concerned with the precise details of what the women *say* as they watch a text that I have suggested reaches out to them 'conversationally' more than symbolically.

Therefore, alongside techniques that I might want to employ from ethnographically grounded audience research, I also require a method for analysing the speech produced by the women at home. There is an interesting debate within social science research about the nature of analysing the responses of informants as we 'let them speak for themselves' within the tradition of ethnography. Within cultural studies and much social science research there is a strong emphasis on being critically reflective of methods and the power dynamics between researcher and researched. Part of these debates has focused upon the power of the researcher to interpret the meanings produced by the subjects of the research. Geertz comments that, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (1973:9). Ethnographic

work is generally accepted to involve the interpretation of meaning and in media research to understand the consumption of the media from what audiences *say* about their lived realities.

However, Buckingham (1991) in an essay entitled 'What are words worth?' expresses doubt about the merits of simply taking the words of informants as they are given, without reflecting upon the conditions in which they are produced. McRobbie too expresses concern with feminists in particular oversimplifying the nature of the spoken word and attaching a 'spurious authenticity' to it:

Here I am questioning the idea that what they say is somehow 'pure' or 'definitive'. True, there is something direct, immediate and concrete about such an account, but the girls or women themselves are part of the social relations of the project.

(McRobbie, 1982/1991:69)

For this research project then, I attempt to reconfigure my approach to the speech of my women informants. In placing emphasis on the speech they produce during the programme in the 'moment' of broadcasting, rather than relying entirely their construction of their viewing experience after the event, it might seem that I am suggesting that I am reaching a 'purer', less *reconstructed* picture of the audience experience. Indeed, I do want to get to some sense of immediacy - but still I intend to treat the speech itself in terms of the details of its very contextualised construction.

## 6.8 Researching speech

Giving more attention to the construction of speech means that I need to draw from areas that are not usually of *central* concern to cultural studies' audience researchers (as described in Chapters One and Two). As early as Morley's *Nationwide* study he briefly suggests the importance of thinking about the language informants use in investigating decodings. He states that, "language must be conceived of as exercising a determining influence on the problems of individual thought and action" (1980:24). This leads to a consideration of the symbolic function of language, which recognizes the socially constructed linguistic resources to which individuals have access. However, methodologically this simply manifests itself in Morley's taping of actual speech. He says:

Thus, I have worked with tapes of respondents' actual speech, rather than simply the substance of their responses, in an attempt to begin to deal with the level of forms of expression and of the degrees of 'fit' between respondents' vocabularies and forms of speech and those of the media (though this aspect of the research is still underdeveloped). For similar reasons I have dealt with open discussion rather than pre-sequenced interview schedules, attempting to impose an order of response as little as possible and indeed taking the premise that the order in which respondents ranked and spoke of issues would itself be a significant finding of the research. (1980:32)

I have some reservations about what Morley claims here, although he does admit underdevelopment. I am not convinced that emphasizing the "order in which respondents ranked and spoke of issues" is the same as drawing attention to their "*forms* of speech" (my italics). Other subsequent studies have imparted greater significance to the construction of interviewees' responses, most notably Corner et. al's (1990) 'ethnodiscursive' approach to their findings. They were more interested in *how* the interviewees said what they said about



the text in terms of the framing styles of their accounts. They suggest that this gave them insight into the subtleties of 'interpretative processing'.

Corner et. al.'s (1990) approach is useful to considering the use of language strategies employed in 'processing'. But I want to use it in a way that is more sensitive to naturally occurring speech in action - not speech elicited directly by myself as a researcher.

Therefore, I am mostly concerned with the speech the women produce in terms of the conversational style with which they respond to the text - whether they use direct address, whether they respond to questions produced by the presenters, in short whether they take up the para-social invitations that I argued in Chapter Five are fundamental to the textual make-up of morning talk programmes. In this way I may find moments that are particularly meaningful to their own lived experience.

In this study, therefore, I take some direction from areas of sociolinguists. There are approaches to the study of language in action which stem from an ethnographic approach to culture. In his series of papers in the 1960s and 1970s, Dell Hymes (1974) shifts away from understanding sociocultural forms and content as a 'product' towards their study as 'process'. In this way "speech is to be analyzed as a linguistic structure within a relativistic (ethnic) and holistic (ethnographic) mode of inquiry" (Schiffrin, 1994:141). Therefore:

Our knowledge of what words and meanings are appropriate for a given time, place and purpose etc. is cultural knowledge. The use of contextualization cues to convey the contextual presuppositions of an utterance displays our communicative competence as a member of a certain

culture and situates us in a particular web of beliefs and actions specific to that culture. (Schiffrin, 1994: 144)

This tradition is thus recognized as the 'ethnography of communication' where linguistic accomplishments are researched in terms of their cultural specificities. It recognizes diversity and searches for variation across cultural distinctions. It thus suggests that speakers are aware of the rules governing the appropriate use of language in different social situations that require wider knowledge than simply linguistic competence, that is the 'communicative competence', which takes into account wider cultural influences. Therefore according to Hymes the goal of studying language in context should be:

to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner. In short a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishments by others. This competence moreover, is integral with attitudes, values and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct. (Hymes, 1971)<sup>7</sup>

It seems to me that one of the diverse ways in which new speech cultures have developed is through the impact 'mass' communications have upon interpersonal communications. The possibility of local and cultural specificities and competences that are produced in the communicative process of watching television require investigation.

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Whilst I want to take the ethnographic imperative from this approach and think about the *accomplishments* of language through specific *competences* in context, scholars in the field of 'ethnography of communication' have largely concentrated on special sorts of speech events other than everyday conversation. In contrast, Moerman suggests that conversation analysis is an appropriate method for an ethnographic approach to speech. His comments resonate with all researchers (including those doing audience research) who collect talk as data:

I am insisting that those who use talk in order to discover what people think must try to find out how the organization of talk influences what people say. The data and techniques of conversation analysis permit this. (Moerman, 1988:9)

In conversation analysis one tapes naturally occurring speech, rather than using other kinds of sociological methods such as surveys or in-depth interviews. As Sacks notes,

Social activities are observable; you can see them all around you, and you can write them down [...]  
If you think you can see it, that means we can build an observational study, and we can build a natural study. (1992:28)

This project therefore does not only rely upon interviews involving the women's responses about what they do, but also upon observing and recording the women's 'naturally occurring' interaction with the broadcast form recalling that "the objects we record, examine, consider and write about occur *in the course of social interaction*" (Moerman,

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Hudson, R.A. (1996:224), no page reference given.



1988:7, my italics). (Obviously my presence as an observer means the research setting is altered from an entirely 'natural' setting, which is a complication in the research that I devote more time to later in the thesis). I have provided an extended account of conversation analysis (CA) in Chapter Four of this thesis and I do not intend to repeat the same ground here, however I think it necessary just to provide a note on methods of transcription.

## 6.9 Transcriptions

In this study, I have transcribed data from women watching the mid-morning programme and subjected it to analysis using tools from CA. In this vein I intend to explore how the women's utterances *accomplish actions* during the viewing 'process'. This means that much of the method in this study relies upon the transcription of the simultaneous data produced from the programme and the viewers. It is important to note that in conversation analysis the transcriptions themselves are not thought of as 'the data' (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). The data are the tape recordings of naturally occurring interactions and the process of transcribing is thought of as the first stage in its interpretation. Elinor Ochs (1979/1999) in her essay 'Transcription as Theory' draws attention to the various decisions made during the transcription process, such as selection and layout of data, as she suggests that, "these skills are critical in understanding and assessing the generalizations reached in a particular study"(1999:168). Transcription therefore is a process that reflects the goals of the research, since it embodies a hypothesis; it is not possible to think that there could be a neutral transcription system.<sup>8</sup>

The central features that a CA transcript attempts to capture are the dynamics of turn-taking - the beginning and ends of turns and the precise details of overlaps, gaps and pauses - as well as the characteristics of the speech delivery such as features of stress, enunciation, intonation and pitch. My data was gained from the recording of the televised text from the VCR at my home and the recording of the women watching the television in their home. I used a boundary microphone so that the television text was also audible on the tape recording of the women's utterances. The transcriptions therefore involved setting out the data in two halves with the broadcast talk on the left and the home talk on the right, mirroring Walkerdine (1986). In CA, transcription turns are marked down the page in chronological order and overlaps marked in brackets. In my transcription overlap occurs between the studio utterances and those at home and therefore moments when the women spoke were carefully marked against the televised talk - side by side on the page. When the women's speech is transcribed next to the text it is done so at the moment in the broadcast that they make an utterance, which gives us a unique way of envisaging their speech in terms of their interaction with the text. I include a full description of the transcription conventions in the Appendix.

To summarise the methodological issues that this study presents I will recount the trajectory that has taken me thus far. At the outset, I argued against a uses and gratifications approach to 'para-social' encounters because surveys cannot engage with the process of the interaction as it takes place. This interest in the interaction as it occurs led me to consider the tradition of media and cultural studies audience research and the debates about the power balance between researching texts and readers. Fiske's concept of the 'producerly

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<sup>8</sup> Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998).

text' allowed me to bring these entities together to focus on 'moments' of television. However, most forms of audience research rely on traditional sociological methods involving interviewing. I argued that to get to the communicative moment of para-social interaction I needed to engage methods of ethnographic inquiry into speaking and the methods of recording and observing naturally occurring interaction. However, the component that is absent from this matrix so far is the feminist angle of this research. I intend that my research into an audience of women who watch a denigrated television form should also follow the methodological paths of feminist research.

#### **6.10 Researching women**

Whilst it is impossible to suggest that there is one 'feminist methodology' that one can employ in any research, it *is* possible to suggest that there is a feminist perspective that informs the way in which research is conducted. Primarily this is influenced by feminist research concerned with making visible the marginalised voices of women in an attempt to evaluate practices and pleasures that have been previously excluded from serious critical concern within the male-dominated academy. In this way, feminist research has been viewed as a corrective to the epistemological accounts of what counts as 'truth' or 'fact' within the history of the social sciences. This has led to feminists breaking into new fields of inquiry against considerable resistance from the mainstream (e.g. CCCS, 1978). Their intention is to take the worlds of women seriously, as for instance in Oakley's (1974a;b) study on housework or in Radway's (1984) study of romance reading. It is important to note, therefore, that the significant paradigmatic shift in terms of the instigation of a



feminist research politics drew upon the slogan 'the personal is political' and thus made the personal worthy of serious academic inquiry. As Stanley and Wise argue:

For us feminist consciousness, feminism itself, is deeply and irrevocably connected to a re-evaluation of 'the personal' and a consequent refusal to see it as inferior to, or even very different from, 'science'. (1983:6)

In the 1980s, therefore, their call was to fill in the gaps by carrying out research which should be about, for, and carried out by women. In this sense, I see this study as contributing to that theoretically informed mapping of women's personal experience and listening to what women have to say, taking their speech seriously so as to determine aspects of the media's role in their daily experience.

However, as I have addressed in Chapters One and Two, more recently post-structuralist concepts of the self have disrupted the ease with which feminist researchers can comfortably continue to add territory to the map of women's experience. In media studies the challenge has been most clearly articulated by Ang and Hermes' argument that research into gendered practices in media consumption has led to the essentializing of gender as an a priori category, advocating "against a continued research emphasis on women's experience, women's culture, women's media consumption as if these were self-contained entities, no matter how internally differentiated" (1996:333). This argument echoes some of the gender and language debates that I discussed earlier and indeed poses some problems to the accepted paradigms of feminist research and has also opened up questions of *which* women, in the acknowledgement of difference. Seiter (1999) suggests that there is a

conflict between theoretical frameworks, modes of doing research and methods. When called to address post-structuralist claims that an individual's subjectivity is never finished and that gender as a category is unstable and constantly in (re)production how does one then carry out the feminist politics of research about women, by women and for women? For Seiter the conflict is as much one that is methodological as it is theoretical:

Ang and Hermes construct media subjectivity through postmodern *theories* of ethnography, through theoretical discussions informed by Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, and others - based at times in textual analysis, but rarely in empirical field research. (Seiter, 1999:29)

Radway, Morley and Gray's work on the other hand is grounded in empirical research where they interpret the construction of gendered subjectivities through observing materially lived relations.

Ang and Hermes are keen to qualify their assertions by suggesting, "that this is not to deny that there are gender differences or gender-specific experiences and practices, it is however to suggest that their meanings are always relative to particular constructions in specified contexts" (1996:333). Seiter (1999) suggests that more sustained ethnographic research might elucidate more shifting positions from informants which may reduce the charge of gender essentialism. My research does not offer such a broad ethnographic perspective. It is centred upon a homogeneous group of white women from the same geographical and similar lower middle-class background, which I maintain is essential to this research if I intend to investigate how this particular group respond to a mode of address which, after all, targets them. The very close discourse analysis that requires painstaking, rigorous

transcription would make a larger group unmanageable for this thesis and thus this focussed research could provide a benchmark against which other mediated identities in talk can be compared.

In some ways, therefore, my research holds its ground in maintaining a focus upon feminine genres and feminine subjectivity in the mould of traditional studies. I still think it important to research the way in which women negotiate and reproduce their gendered selves (even if these are only part of a more complicated web of identities) without falling into the essentializing of what it means to be a woman. In the same way in which I do not conceive of the text as whole and unitary, neither do I conceive of the women in my study as such. I do not propose to generalise from these experiences of this particular group of lower middle-class women. Rather, I am investigating a moment where specific discourses of the private meet across a mediated experience. It is possible, as I began to put forward in Chapter Two, that we can comprehend the responses of the women as 'performances' of gender (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1995b;1998a;1998b), in response to the mediated 'performances' of gender that are communicated in the text. I have asserted in Chapter Five that the discourse of the text constructs a feminine gendered address - does it not make sense to understand how women (in the first instance, and not men) discursively respond to that address in order to investigate whether these mediated performances assist in the reproduction of lived performances? Clearly, whilst postmodern texts may resist a tight semiotic meaning, in this instance, they do not resist a gendered *address*. Not all texts may be so clearly marked and thus call upon multiple subjectivities, but I have demonstrated that morning talk constructs a specific domestic space that is predominantly feminine.



Therefore, the methodological drive should insist upon a gendered account of what is, after all, a gendered practice.

To some extent, I have conducted this research using the methods that other feminist scholars in the field have developed before me. This affects mostly my reflection upon strategies of interviewing and power relations in the field. In one of the most influential essays in feminist interviewing strategies, Oakley (1981) charts the ground feminist researchers should address the bias embedded in traditional research techniques. She calls attention to the way in which the traditional insistence upon objectivity creates and reinforces a hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched, which any feminist researcher should resist as we are let into the lives of others. Feminist approaches therefore have tended to adopt open-ended interviewing techniques, processes of listening, and reciprocity, which allow women to speak for themselves in a comfortable situation that recognises the subjective position of the researcher within the research.

Issues of ethics therefore are also central to feminist concerns about ethnography. Stacey (1988) argues that ethnography can be the most exploitative method of research since it involves gaining the trust of informants, spending time with them and then possibly abandoning them in order to remove yourself to write about what you have learned from their experience. Hobson (1982) Gray (1992) and Skeggs (1995) describe the ways in which they were deeply involved with the women in their studies, making friends with them and sometimes becoming counselors to them. Skeggs remarks:

It is very difficult to drive away in a nice car to a warm house to write when the person you have known for the last ten years is about to have the last of her furniture removed by bailiffs for unpaid bills. (1995:198/199)

Nevertheless, ethnographic research is carried out by 'getting inside' a culture or to use the popular phrase 'going native'. Oakley (1981) suggests that any feminist interviewing women is both 'inside' the culture and participating in what she observes. Gray (1992) goes as far as to suggest that she is one of the women in her study. Influenced by debates about the power of the researcher, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity, Gray's 'sample', like mine, was limited to an all-white, fairly homogeneous group. She suggests that, "there is also the issue of certain kinds of 'shared knowledges' which are quite crucial to the kinds of research method I employed and which are part of a cultural 'reservoir' upon which interviewer and interviewee can draw" (1995:161/162).

### **6.11 Practicalities, methods and problems**

In planning the recruitment of subjects for this research, I had to keep in mind the theoretical criteria that I had been developing. To research women in terms of their speech and interaction with morning television, I needed a group which could be described as a 'speech network' (Milroy, 1980), which requires that there would be some connection between the women who could be constituted as 'community' of speakers. This would provide some consistency between speech patterns in the analysis of their discursive practices with the texts. Therefore, I wanted to find a group of women that already had a sense of cohesion. I did not create a community, as Gray (1992) did in her research, but since I too am one of the speakers involved in the research, I simply went home to a group

of women that I knew, and with whom I shared a regional accent. This was felt to be especially important at the time, since I was based at Queen Margaret University College in Edinburgh and encountering a group of Scottish women might have proved more problematic, both in terms of the establishment of rapport as well as in the analysis of transcripts without a native accent. Hence, the women in this research are all white, lower middle or working class, although of different ages, and all from around the Cannock area in Staffordshire which is heavily influenced by the legacy of the mining industry of the Midlands.

In the tradition of most ethnographic practice I needed a 'gatekeeper' through which to gain 'entry' into the field. I gained access to a group of women who regularly met on a Monday evening in Great Wyrley, a village near Cannock. The gatekeeper was my mother, referred to as 'Polly' in this study, and the group of women were her friends from the local Cannock Catholic parish of St. Mary's and St. Thomas More's, some of whom were members of the St. Thomas More's Ladies Guild. Using a 'snowballing' technique some of the women recommended their friends to the study too.

I attended a couple of their weekly meetings in December 1995 when they were organizing the Christmas fete and asked them if they watched television in the mornings. Some were hesitant to admit this and a little suspicious of why I could possibly be interested in them watching television. I found myself continually reinforcing that I liked 'Richard and Judy' too, aware of the popular negativity about much daytime television that was in the popular press at the time. I spent time explaining my Ph.D. research, what I was doing in



Edinburgh, and that I was interested in women watching television in the morning.

Informal discussions took place which I did not record at the time, since I had not initially intended to research the women's responses together. Rather I was interested in their domestic consumption in keeping with the ethnographic tradition of audience research. But the kinds of discussion that occurred, and the repetition of phrases like 'Richard and Judy think they're your friends', made me interested in getting the women together to talk about the programmes. This would also enable me to observe them as speakers amongst their friends as well as watching television with them in their homes and interviewing them alone.

The women who watched these programmes were more than happy to let me come and watch the programmes with them and let me talk to them about it afterwards - provided I attended the Christmas fete! I carried out thirteen individual interviews (ten of which are used in the study)<sup>9</sup> between 1996 and 1998 and I transcribed them, according to CA criteria, as I went along. I carried out the focus group discussion in 1998 along with two more interviews. Some of the women were only involved in one part of the research depending upon the timing of my visits home, their responsibilities and what they felt comfortable contributing to. I will indicate their involvement in the research in their biography outlines.

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<sup>9</sup> One interview tape was distorted due to a problem with the recording equipment, one interview considered the 'chat' programme *Pebble Mill At One* which was shortly taken off air and another was based on *Ricki Lake* when I had intended to compare US and UK version of the programmes. I abandoned this approach as the interview opened up the perceived radical differences between two cultural styles which I felt required further research about national difference than I could adequately provide here.

The individual interviewing process generated the most interesting results, although it also raised issues, some of which I am unable to resolve. The research itself stemmed from working from a 'hunch', like Gray (1995), which was based upon what I had observed and experienced in my own and my friends' viewing of these programmes, mostly as an undergraduate student living in a house with four other young women. The hunch was that the reasons why we (and not our male friends) were more involved in these programmes was because they literally (and not entirely in an Althusserian way) spoke to us and we responded. As multiple ordinary voices came from the TV set, so we sympathized, reacted to their suggestions and often set them straight. It seemed that these programmes engaged us as we would talk to another speaker in the room. My research sought to explore this possible phenomenon with other women as they watched in their usual environment.

When I went to the women's homes, therefore, I asked if I could put the tape recorder on whilst we watched the programme. However, I never placed much emphasis on this part of the process, rather on the actual 'interview' which had a name. I also never stressed to the women that I was interested in what they said and did during the program until informal conversations after the research process. The reason for this was because I did not want the women to feel conscious of their actions during viewing. As much as possible I wanted the women to act 'naturally' because, and this is another hunch, talking to the television set might seem silly - the kind of thing one might disparage a woman for, a result of 'watching too much telly'. I did not want the women to think that as a university researcher I would read what they did in such a patronizing way, so I simply, and now I reflect possibly unethically, played down this part of the research process. I have since talked about this



with some of the women who do not object, although I wished that I had recorded their conversations about this element of the research.

There is also another problem embedded in this section of the research process. I have said that I wanted the women, as far as possible, to feel uninhibited in their verbal responses to the televised text. However, my presence as a researcher will have undoubtedly have affected the viewing environment. Although I had asked the women to continue about their daily business as they would usually do in the morning, it was difficult for them to do as I was also in some ways an invited guest as well as a researcher. Because I had said that I wanted to watch television with them, some of the women reported having done some of their usual tasks early so that they could concentrate on watching the programme with me. This presents a problem, because in the interviews many of the women reported that they did not usually 'sit down' for long to view, but rather, listened to the text whilst doing other household chores. If 'sitting down' is criteria for more attentive viewing then this may have altered the findings of the research. It is impossible to tell how significant this is. It may be possible in future research to ask the women to switch on the tape recorder without a present researcher, but this would mean that the viewing context itself is not being observed. As becomes evident in Chapter Eight, some of my observations are only possible through being there. My presence also *adds* something to the findings as the women also begin to reveal personal experiences in relation to the text that might have gone unrecorded had I not been present as is explored in Chapter Eight.



My experience at the Ladies Guild meetings led me to gather the women together in July 1998 for a focus group. This was straightforward since many of the women often gathered together for church functions anyway. I provided them some food and wine at my mother's house and set the women talking about morning television. Often I asked questions but also took part in the debates as another participant. This was a really interesting experience, since it was both a constructed 'event' in the interests of my research, as well as something that might have naturally occurred anyway. After the discussion lapsed from what I was interested in and I had turned off the tape recorder, the women all stayed into the early hours of the morning and generally said they had a great time and would be glad to take part in any more 'research' that I might want to do. I also transcribed the recording of the focus group in terms of CA transcription methods, which was extremely time consuming.

I have known many of the women since I was a child, which has repercussions in the power dynamics of the research experience. Usually, in the case of ethnographic research, the researcher is in the powerful position of gaining knowledge about the informants' personal lives which is not necessarily reciprocated by the researcher. In the interests of feminist research I might engage in some level of reciprocity, but for some of the informants this was not necessary, as they already knew detailed information about my life through my mother. In these cases, although some of them viewed my 'new job' after university as curious, they were in an empowered situation.

Opening the interview discussion in their homes was often controlled by them and their recounting of how my life had led me here and even how I had 'grown up'. I had attended

school with some of the women's children and therefore sometimes the initial conversation was about their children and their lives. Although I had not seen some of these women for years, the research experience was fore-grounded by familiarity and mostly ease, which made the process less intimidating. This echoes what Oakley (1981) suggests may be characteristic of feminist research whereby when the researcher does not adopt a detached position. For instance, she found in her research into women's experiences of childbirth that, "interviewees very often took the initiative in defining the interviewer-interviewee relationship as something which existed beyond the limits of question-asking and answering" (1981:45). To some extent, therefore, my relationship with the women had already been defined which, whilst it was reassuring, was also at times problematic and I had difficulty occasionally breaking off the opening banter to settle down and watch the programme or shifting the discussion from a sociable chat to a research encounter.

There are both positive and negative features to such a familiar research environment, the contradictions of which are related to the theoretical influences on the research. In terms of researching speech in action (during the focus group and taping the women during the programme particularly) I felt I was recording and observing to some extent 'naturally occurring' speech in the manner in which Sacks would approve. It was less artificially constructed than other methods of audience research, but still, as discussed above, influenced by my presence. Jennifer Coates (1998) in her extensive research on the talk between women friends has continually taped the conversations between her female friends in which she was a participant. On the other hand, in terms of asking the women questions about the texts, it was very difficult to retain a sense of control as the researcher.

Much of what the women actually said about the texts was very repetitive and I often had to repeat my questions to attempt to draw out what each question specifically meant.

Whilst the group conversation contained some interesting insights into the way the women articulated themselves amongst their friends and some humorous expression, the content of what they said tended mostly to replicate the kinds of things that they had already said in the individual interviews. This draws me to another response to media researchers (such as, Seiter, 1999 and Gillespie, 1995) who suggest the need for more extensive and sustained ethnographic inquiry into approaches to media audiences. My insistence on retaining the importance of the specific texts meant that I continually wanted the audience to refer to their relationship with that text. But as Hermes (1995) points out, sometimes reflection upon everyday practices does not produce lengthy considered responses. I found that often I was asking what *I* thought, were very different questions, but to which I was receiving very repetitive answers. At points I felt that what I was actually doing was leading them to my reading of the texts and so I eventually became much more of a participant than a researcher. It is not that the women were disengaged from the subject, simply that the nuances in the text that I saw as researcher were not obvious to the women who, whilst they were all interviewed because they liked the programmes, watched them as fairly uneventful parts of their daily routine.

## **6.12 Biographies of the women in the study**

It is necessary here to describe the women involved in the study and something of their lives, background and relationship to each other. All of the women lived in or near the



Cannock area, almost all attended the local Catholic Church, or were in some way connected to the community, possibly through a friend:

### *Polly*

My mother. She is married to my father, an electrician, in her early sixties and lives in her own home in a village called Wedges Mills, on the outskirts of Cannock. She has three adult children who at the time of this study were 34, 32 and 24. She has been a housewife since her children were born but used to work as a dinner lady at the local primary school. She is a committed member of the St. Thomas More Ladies Guild and until recently ran the St. Thomas More Brownie pack with Eve, another member of the research group. She acted as the 'gatekeeper' in my study sounding out the Ladies Guild before my attendance and helping in arranging interviews and providing the venue for the focus group. She knows all the women in the study, some of whom are her close friends and two are her sisters - Sandra and Eve.

[Focus group. I chose not to interview Polly because I felt that watching television with my mother presented another, too powerful influence over the research findings]

### *Sandra*

She is married, in her mid fifties with a 19 year-old son and lives in her own home in a small village called Cheslyn Hay, on the outskirts of Cannock. She and her husband, a self-employed driving instructor, are actively involved in the local Catholic Church. They are both 'lay' ministers and regularly administer communion to the sick of the parish. Sandra is a key member of the St. Thomas More Ladies Guild who takes a lead role in the organizing

of their events. She is also a member of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service and delivers 'meals -on- wheels' to the elderly in the area. She also works part-time as a school cleaner at the local High School. She is sister to Eve, Polly and aunt to me. She a close friend of Patricia's, Myra's, Cathy's, Alice's and Jana's.

[Interview and focus group]

### *Eve*

Eve is married, in her late fifties and lives in her now privately owned council house on an estate also in Cheslyn Hay. Her husband is retired due to ill health and she has two grown-up sons who have both left home but live close by. She is also actively involved in the local Catholic Church. At the time of the interviews she was also 'Tawny Owl' of the St. Thomas More Church Brownie Pack. She too is a member of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service and delivers 'meals-on-wheels' as well as working part-time as a cleaner at the local High School. She is the sister of Sandra, Polly, aunt to me, and close friends with Bette, Myra, Cathy and Alice.

[Interview]

### *Jenny*

Jenny is 25 years old, single and living with her mother and brother in Penkridge, a small village outside of Cannock. At the time of the study she was working part-time at a local pub after giving up her job as a legal secretary to travel. She is a coach at the local Cheslyn Hay gymnastics club. She is a friend of mine, Emma's, Jana's, Cathy's and Angela's.

[Interview and focus group]

### *Alice*

Alice is in her late forties and has four children between the ages of 15 and 23 - 2 boys and 2 girls. She lives with her children and her husband, an engineer, in their privately owned home on an estate in Great Wyrley. She is actively involved in the local Church and member of the Ladies Guild. Alice also works part time as a clerical assistant for the Child Protection Agency. She is a close friend to Polly, Eve, Sandra, Cathy, Myra and Patricia. I went to school with her children.

[Interview]

### *Angela*

Aged 32 and married, her husband runs his own business in car parts and they have 2 young daughters aged 2 and 5. She lives in a detached house on a fairly affluent estate - Heath Hayes- an extension of Cannock. She is involved in the wider parish church of St. Mary's, her children attend the local parish primary school. She works part-time as a district nurse and is a close friend of Jana's and a friend of mine, Jenny's and Emma's.

[Interview and focus group]

### *Cathy*

Aged in her late thirties, divorced and lives with her two children aged 11 and 15 in Cheslyn Hay in a privately owned home. She is also involved in the local Catholic Church and member of the Ladies Guild. Her eldest daughter attends the Catholic comprehensive school and her son attends a school for children with learning difficulties. She is a close



friend of Sandra's and friends with Polly, Eve, Alice, Myra, Jana and Cathy. Her daughter was a member of the St Thomas More Brownie Pack.

[Interview and focus group]

### *Myra*

Myra is the oldest woman in the study. In her mid seventies, she is originally from Ireland and lives with her, also retired, husband in their own home in Great Wyrley. She has one son who has moved away from home. Myra lives very close to St. Thomas More's church hall where the Ladies Guild meetings are held. Both her and her husband are very involved in the church activities. She used to work as a support teacher at the local church primary school when I attended and is still a very active member of the Ladies Guild. She is good friends with Polly, Sandra, Eve and Alice.

[Interview]

### *Bette*

Is in her mid sixties and lives in a council house in Cannock. She used to work in the theatre and was an 'aqua-belle' in the 1950s. Now retired from the theatre, she lives near Cannock town centre with her lesbian partner in a rented council home. She is a good friend of Eve's and also knows Polly and Sandra but is possibly the least integrated member of this group. I also interviewed her sister for the study but have not used the data since the programme we watched together was *Pebble Mill at One*, another daytime chat/magazine programme which was axed by the BBC shortly after my research began.

[Interview]

### ***Patricia***

She is in her late fifties and lives in her privately owned detached home with her husband, a salesman, and one of their three daughters. The youngest daughter was 18 at the time of the study and the other two were 25 and 28. Patricia is actively involved in the Ladies Guild and church activities. Her husband is a minister at the church. She is very close friends with Sandra and also friends with Myra, Polly and Eve. I also am good friends with one of her daughters.

[Focus group - interview tape faulty]

### ***Emma***

The youngest member of the study, she is 21 and a teacher training student at the local university. She lives with her family in Cannock and attended the local Catholic secondary school. She is also a gym instructor at Cheslyn Hay Gymnastics Club. She is close friends with me, Jenny, Jana and Cathy.

[interview]

### ***Jana***

She is 32, divorced and a part-time cardiac care nurse at a local hospital. She lives in her own home in Cannock town centre. She attends the Catholic Church and her only son, aged 6 attends the local catholic primary school. She is a close friend to Angela, Sandra, Jenny and Emma. [focus group]

All of the women in the study, although not all are members of the Ladies Guild, are in some way connected to each other.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to collect together the various theoretical threads that will impinge upon the carrying out of research into this audience. This has involved finding methods appropriate to a feminist approach to a gendered audience that can take into account the structure of talk. I have outlined a method to analyse the text in action, to perceive how the communication process is mutually constructed in the moment of broadcasting through focusing on the production of the two simultaneous texts of the studio and the audience. Finally, I have introduced the reader to my group of women and attempted to present some of the methodological issues involved in interviewing people that are familiar to you. In the next two chapters I present my research findings.



## Chapter Seven

### Talking About Daytime Talk

#### Introduction

As I suggested in the last chapter, the main focus of this research is on what the women say *during* their experiences of watching morning talk at home. My findings in this chapter, therefore, function mostly to contextualise the findings in Chapter Eight, which discusses the women's responses whilst viewing in terms of para-social interaction. This chapter will give the reader some insight into the impressions that the women from Cannock give about why they watch these programmes and the pleasures that they get from them. This helps to inform some of the findings that are discussed in the following chapter and provides some background to the contexts in which the mediated exchanges take place.

The data in this chapter is taken from the interviews I conducted with the women after watching the programmes with them and from the focus group discussion. I have transcribed their responses in accordance with CA conventions, which means that this chapter will also represent the women's actions as speakers as well as informants. As a speech network we can see how the women accomplish certain readings of the texts together. I tended to ask the women questions that were related loosely to three areas:

- i. previous findings about women's viewing pleasures and habits in the home (see Chapter One),
- ii. contemporary debates about talk based programming (see Chapter Three),

- iii. the ways in which I was beginning to conceive of the texts as functioning para-socially (see Chapters Four and Five).

I will therefore present their responses around these three areas although, obviously, these are rather general and overlapping themes that were the result of my own conceptual organization rather than those of my informants.

### 7.1 Morning television in the home

I asked the women how watching these morning programmes fits in with their daily routines. The women who are married and run their own homes all describe their practices in terms which echo media research into women's consumption of the mass media a decade or more ago. The practice has to fit in with their domestic responsibilities. For instance, this is one woman's description of her typical morning:

Sandra: Well I'd be u:p and busying meself (.) I'd've probably go:ne- I'd have had me dryer on- I've got a basket of washing there to dry and I'd've been ironing what's in the ba:sket and I'd've gone up the sho:p and got me bit of me:at and I'd have been preparing the dinner and might have washed me ha:ir and gone and tootled round the bathroom you know I'd have been busyin (.) I'd come and I'd have had me a coffee and I'd've sat and watched it a bit but I mean I might have sat and watched it for half an hour - I'd have sat and watched it for half an hour having me breakfast.

[Interview 16/1/96]

The *This Morning* programme, which Sandra watches, begins at 10.15 am. Sandra works as a cleaner at the local school first thing in the morning from around 7.30am until 9.00am. Note the amount of chores that she is able to do around watching the programmes - drying clothes, ironing clothes, washing her hair, tidying the bathroom, shopping for the 'bit of

meat' and beginning to prepare dinner. The programme is two hours long and amongst all that Sandra will also allow herself to have breakfast. Many of the married women tell similar narratives of how they organise their household jobs around watching morning programmes:

Helen: How would you fit it [*This Morning*] into your typical day?

Angela: erm, I'd put it on in 'e:re [the kitchen] probably either washing up or doing the ironing or all so::rts just in there, I'll put it on and then if there's something really interesting on then I'll sit down and watch it. But its background I'll listen to it more than anything.

[Interview 18/1/96]

The most common response was that they tend to do the ironing or other tasks and 'listen' rather than sit and attentively 'view', which replicates the way in which other researchers have discussed how television viewing for women is bound up with the expectations upon them in the home (e.g. Morley, 1986 and Hobson, 1980).

Some of the women's responses reflect the complicated relationship between 'leisure' and 'work' that emerges in research into women's domestic labour. The women express feelings of 'guilt' if they sit and watch television without at least occupying themselves with something else. Alice says:

Alice: I've always liked it [*Kilroy*] but the problem is (.) I've got itchy feet to get away. I feel guilty to sit down and in the daytime and watch the telly. I think that's cos I do:: find them interesting.

[Interview 14/5/96]



The issue of 'sitting down' reappears in some of the women's responses. Sitting down becomes associated with not doing anything else and with attentive viewing. As Sandra stresses:

Sandra: I'm not one for just sitting. I'm not a sitter, so if I really need a break and I have a cup of coffee and sit down it's like as if I've got company in the room.

[Interview 16/1/96]

Therefore, 'sitting down' to watch television becomes something that is only acceptable if it is for a valid break. Watching morning talk programmes is embedded within the structuring of daily tasks for the married women and associated with 'guilty pleasures' and half-attentive viewing practices that have been described by earlier researchers (Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1986 and Gray, 1992).

One of the other comments above is that 'it's company', which was commonly reiterated by the women who are mostly at home alone in the daytime. This replicates Hobson's (1982) early findings about the mass media providing women who are at home in the daytime, with companionship and converges with the (over deterministic) reasoning behind the uses and gratifications, PSI scale (Chapter Six).

These issues are brought together in the focus group discussion along with some interesting nuances:

1       Helen:     What are the appeals of watching TV in the daytime and how does it fit in with your



possibly their responses might be related to the fact their domestic environments are not entirely organised around dominant patriarchal relations.

In the interviews with the two youngest women who both live with their parents, one would watch morning programmes in bed and the other whilst she was getting ready for her lunch-time shift working at the pub. Thus, whilst the older women's viewing habits reinforce the older studies, even after more than a decade of 'change', there are some differences amongst the younger women who perhaps are head of their household or work part-time which alters the relationship between work and leisure at home.

## **7.2. Gender/genre**

One of the other central themes that permeates TV research into domestic consumption is the gendering of taste. Most studies support a distinction between women preferring fiction whilst men prefer factual programming (e.g Morley, 1986). When I asked the women about what they and their male partners watched, this was mostly replicated. Many of the women reported watching a lot of soap opera - in fact soap opera was the one time where they insisted that their taste takes preference over the rest of the family or their partner.<sup>1</sup> Many of the women said that they like films whilst they often reported that their partners preferred documentaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Although one woman said that her husband bought her a television for the kitchen to solve the problem of arguing over programme choice.



However, asking this question about taste provided some complicated answers which were not reducible to a straightforward distinction. I asked Angela whether she and her husband shared similar viewing taste to which the immediate answer was yes:

Angela: Yes, I'd probably watch more soaps if he let me but he doesn't like watching them. If I wanna watch one I'll watch it on my own or something. Like *Coronation Street* or *Emmerdale* he doesn't let me have it on. Well (.) he'd just go out of the room I think (1) but I'm not that bothered about it. Yeh, we both like documentaries and real life things really. We've got the same taste (.) we only watch the same programmes. He's a bit more space-fied than me. He likes space things.

[Interview 18/1/96]

This is curious, since it is clear to me that their preferences are not the same and she admits that her husband censors her viewing when he does not approve. Angela still suggests that they have the same tastes as they watch documentaries together - it is not clear whether this is due more to her partner's authority than to her own taste. Perhaps it is in the interest of spending time together since 'he'd just go out of the room' during a soap opera, that they 'watch the same programmes', as Angela points to a difference in documentary content - his preference for programmes about space.

Interpreting Angela's answer probably suggests that their practices replicate the conventional distinction more than she directly admits, but what this draws attention to is that the distinction is certainly blurred by relations in the home. One of the women, Eve, suggests that her and her husband's preferences are the opposite to what one might think as dominant. Her husband prefers cooking programmes where she prefers documentaries.

Whilst there may be a general trend which accords with expectations, taste in general was by no means consistent.

Most interesting to this study, however, are the women's responses when I asked them about what their male partners thought of morning talk shows. All of the women said that their partners would not watch any of the morning talk based programmes that we discussed. The gendered nature of morning talk programming was articulated very clearly and consistently:

Angela: He wouldn't watch TV in the day. He'd put the radio on or listen to music. I don't think he'd like it if he was here. He'd be like 'ooh I can't be bothered with tha::t typical male attitude.

Helen: Why's that?

Angela: He'd find it all too wo::men's [stress implies derogatory reference] stuff. He'd find it all too artificial. They don't have cars or space do they? I think its more geared to women. [Stan] wouldn't be interested in fashion or cookery. They're geared up for women. They don't put sports on. They might do the occasional decorating thing.

[Interview 18/1/96]

Angela's suggestion that her husband would not like it is, as one might expect, based upon the content of the programmes - the fashion and cookery sections of the magazine programme. However, considering talk programmes as a 'genre' presents interesting complications to the generic fact/fiction - masculine/feminine - distinction. One of the women's responses provides an interesting contradiction to traditional findings:

Helen: Why do you think these programmes are on in the morning and not at night?

Sandra: Because the me::n, when the men come home from work they don't want to be sitting watching, they'd think it was a load of twaddle wouldn't they?







40 [indecipherable, simultaneous talk]  
 [...]
   
 41 Helen: Don't the men you know get involved in these discussions?
   
 42 Patricia: Oh, no, they've always gotta watch their image more than the women.
   
 43 Angela: They probably watch more, like the *Question Time* at night, but not=
   
 44 Sandra: = not the day ones.
   
 45 Helen: Why do you think that [is?
   
 46 Angela: [My 'usband 'd 'ave [the radio on.
   
 47 Sandra: [They shut off, like [Polly] ses, they dow
   
 48 wanna be involved, they do wanna know, do they?
   
 49 → Patricia: They think all that's silly women's talk.
   
 50 Others: mmm, mmm, mmm
   
 [Focus group 24/7/98]

There are a lot of references that require explanation from this extract. One is that the women are clear that the men they know would not be interested in the programmes we were discussing. It is interesting that 'magazines', presumably with their gossip columns, problem pages, consumer advice etc. are compared to this kind of programming which discuss women's private world that they also claim men find secretly intriguing. Polly interestingly says that it is because 'men don't like the real world' (line 14), which Patricia supports and Sandra reproduces the example she had discussed in her interview, where her husband would prefer the fictional world of a 'cowboy' film (line 16). Seemingly their partners appreciate the factual world of the documentary but not the 'real' world of personal experience that is the mainstay of morning talk. This draws our attention to differences to what the 'real world' means in gendered terms. For these women, 'reality' refers to personal

immediate experience, whereas for their partners, seemingly the 'real world' is the world 'out there' (e.g. space), detached from personal experience.

### 7.3 Gendered debate

Livingstone's (1994) study, taken from the wider research findings of *Talk on Television*, focuses on the gendered differences in audience responses to participatory programming. She sums up the main differences in men's and women's readings:

Compared with men, women are more likely to consider that the genre offers a sphere in which they can participate, feeling involved, and that the issues are relevant to their own lives. They are more likely than men to believe that the genre offers a fair and valuable debate within this sphere, and hence to disagree that debates are too chaotic and biased. Men are more likely to consider experts more worth hearing than the laity while women especially emphasize the importance of giving a say to ordinary people. Also women, in particular consider that the debates are of *social* value, while men were more likely to consider them pointless in that they reached no clear conclusion and were considered to have little influence. (Livingstone, 1994:435)

There is little point in a lengthy reiteration of the women's responses in accordance with Livingstone's more representative findings, but I want to tease out the relevance of some Livingstone's arguments to my own research and reassess this in terms of para-social interaction.

An interesting feature that permeates the women's discussion of gender difference in approaches to the form are the references to 'talk'. Angela says in the focus groups extract above, 'well they don't talk as much do they [...] they don't discuss things like women' (line



5) and then at the end of the extract Patricia suggests that 'they think its all silly women's talk' (line 49). It is the mention of orality that is interesting here and the way in which the women reproduce common cultural assumptions about male and female speech. The women are clearly aware of the fact that talking about things that are 'real' to them is clearly down-graded - recall Sandra's mention of her husband thinking that it was all 'twaddle'. These programmes may not be fiction but they 'talk' about the same world as the soap opera - the private and the personal - rather than the public world talked about in *Question Time*. This brings us to the kind of debates that have grounded this research.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the ways in which women's talk has been derided as inconsequential under the term gossip and in Chapter Three, I discussed the ways in which there is a political gendering of the spheres of the public and the private. Sandra seems to recognize this the most in her interview:

Sandra: My 'usband would say its a wa:ste of time to sit and watch. "What a wa:ste of time is there nothing better to watch" he'd say. So I think that's why they put it on because that's what women like to sit and watch.

Helen: Why a wa:ste of time?

Sandra: I don't know maybe its because I'm small minded and sma:ll things interest me and I can't watch things that are deep. I mean the things [Terry] puts on I'm totally bored with.

Helen: And yet one of the discussions that was on [*This Morning*] just was about a woman that made a big decision about having a termination, it wasn't something small.

Sandra: No, that was really serious but er well it isn't less important but it would be to a man [assumes a different voice] "that's her business what's er comin"- y'know they just wouldn't consider that anythin they wanna listen to. [Terry] e'd rather sit and watch who's conquered Everest and God

knows when you know who climbed some North Pole or whatever, he wouldn't be interested in who had a termination (.) he'd think that was just gossip and yet I love it.

[Interview 16/1/96]

Given the resource constraints and the decision to focus on women's talk, I did not speak to the women's partners but clearly this might have added an interesting dimension to the assumptions about the gendering of taste. However, what is important here is the way the women perceive their practices in terms of their material experience with their male partners. To Sandra, her interests are 'small' things whilst her husbands are 'deep'. He is interested in the 'serious' public world of mountaineering for instance, whereas her private concerns such as, in this case termination, are inconsequential. Again this public/private distinction is reiterated in terms of orality - it's 'just gossip'.

Livingstone interprets her findings in terms of a feminist re-evaluation of the public sphere where the debate about feminine forms such as gossip are compared to masculine forms of rational debate. She draws upon Gilligan's (1989) argument about women's moral judgement (outlined in Chapter Two) which stresses that it should be thought of as *contextual* and not 'woolly' as the more traditional (masculine) form of moral reasoning would suggest. This contextual emphasis means that women become immersed in the details of relationships and narratives, as we have seen in the tradition of researching women's relationships with the soap opera. Therefore, Sandra is interpreting her own interests in terms of her husband's masculine and traditional moral judgment as 'small' and inconsequential. Gilligan argues that men, "intellectualise to an inappropriate extent, denying the complex claims of interpersonal situational details" (Livingstone, 1994:437).

For Benhabib (1992) a masculinist, formal and philosophical approach to the moral domain has led to the invisibility or a 'privatisation' of women's experience.

## 7.4 Experience and the expert/lay discourse debate

What is beginning to emerge then, in women's discussion, is the importance of 'talk' and contextual 'experience' to how the women feel about the programmes. As in Livingstone's study the women were more critical of experts' abstract intellectual responses and sympathetic to the lay person's expression of experiential context. In Eve's interview she describes the experts as too 'goody goody' and Cathy uses the phrase 'do-gooders'. There is clearly some animosity here and the women in the group are very eloquent about their objections to 'experts' as in this extract from the focus group:

- 1 Angela: They do have the professionals on though, don't they, to give their point of view.
- 2 Patricia: They usually slau::ghter them don't they?
- 3 Others: Heh, heh, heh,
- 4 Cathy: A lot of 'em are goody goodies though [aren't they really?
- 5 Sandra: [ye:h, they get on your nerves sometimes
- 6 Jana: heh,heh,heh
- 7 Cathy: Do gooders, I mean there's been a really bad kid n' 'e really needs a good beltin'
- 8 doen'e?
- 9 Others: heh,heh,heh
- 10 Patricia: Inste:ad you've gotta analyse this one an' send 'im bars of choc [olate everyday
- 11 Sandra: [yeh , yeh.
- 12 Cathy: Send 'im on a holiday somewhere like to Barbados for a couple of weeks n' 'e'll come
- 13 back=



- 14 Patricia: = a real beautiful boy=  
 15 Cathy: =yeah

[Focus group 24/7/97]

The women jointly articulate the way in which expert opinion can sometimes confound their common-sense experiential knowledge. Here, they are talking about the treatment of young offenders and the way in which they sometimes get rewards in accordance with social and psychological explanations of behaviour, rather than with the common sense solution of punishment.<sup>2</sup>

As the women talk they begin to reason about why there appears to be such an incongruity between expert opinion and their own:

- 1 Helen: Are the experts necessary then?  
 2 Patricia: I think sometimes they can make it more frustrating though can't they, y' know if you're  
 3 watching something and you can see, like [Cathy] 'as just said 'oh:: send 'em off for a  
 4 holiday - y'know, we've sort of analyzed this and what 'ave ya and the answer to this is  
 5 that 'e needs to be sent on a holiday n' you're thinking well no 'e doesn't that's not right  
 6 so you're on-  
 7 Others: ( [ ] )  
 8 Cathy: [or tend to make excuses for 'em like they've come  
 9 from a deprived background. Well not a::ll kids who are deprived go off and do things,  
 10 so really, you can't put it down to that, but the experts always do.  
 11 Jana: Well that's 'cos the experts don't come from deprived backgrounds=  
 12 Cathy: =EXACTLY (.)

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<sup>2</sup> There had recently been public discontent over a news story about young offenders going on government funded sailing holidays which may have provided the background for this discussion.

[illegible]





means I don't understand a lot of their technical jargon, it needs to be broken down into basic English and I feel like I'm thick and I think I don't understand a lot of their technical jargon it needs to be broken down into basic English and I think this programme erm particularly it is and if anybody uses the jargon that's way over them Kilroy brings them back down to earth and says that you know we don't understand that we're orinary sort of people.

[Interview 15/5/96]

What this highlights, is not simply that expert answers seem objectionable to common-sense thinking, which, as McLaughlin (1993) points out, should still be observed with caution as ideological and problematic. Rather, sometimes there is a distrust which stems from power relations in discourse which may be based upon personal experience. Cathy's son is epileptic and she has been to the hospital many times where she will have confronted the explanations of a number of doctors. Whilst the privileging of common sense might not necessarily be something we want to applaud per se, it is important to recognize that the pleasures people seek in its televised display come from the inequality and power distribution between speakers in certain institutional conditions.<sup>3</sup> Cathy's evaluation is precisely based upon incidents located in personal experience and not in abstract argument. In other words, the form in which she answers reinforces her criticism of the 'experts'. Her comments also shows her acceptance of Kilroy as 'hero', as 'one of us', who intervenes in this power dynamic which I drew attention to in the textual analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> The power at work in conversational interaction between doctor-patient interviews is an area many conversational analysts have researched.

In contrast, lay speakers are applauded for their 'honesty' (Alice) and their ability to 'speak from experience' (focus group). The women's impression of the lay speakers, the 'ordinary people', was that for them it is a kind of therapy:

- 1       Helen:     How do the 'ordinary' people come off then?
- 2       Polly:     Some of 'em get really get, go through the mill don't they, don't they, really feel sorry for
- 3                 some of 'em, I do.
- 4       Patricia:  yeh, some of 'em you wonder why they've come on because they get themselves so upset
- 5                 - and they really [dig deep into their own personal life to tell you things -
- 6       Polly:                 [yeh
- 7   → Patricia:  you think oh how brave'
- 8       Cathy:     yeh
- 9       Patricia:  I'd never go on and say things like [that     (1)             tell everything, all
- 10      Polly:                         [No, no, some of 'em, really feel sorry for
- 11      Patricia:   the world my problems
- 12      Polly:     some of 'em 'cos they really 'ave a go at 'em don't they?
- 13      Sandra:    It isn't as though- I mean, your face is on the screen isn't it, it isn't as though you're sort
- 14                 of er anonymous or anything - just a voice - when your face is there for everyone to see
- 15                 in it?
- 16      Helen:     Why do you think people do that then?
- 17      Jana:       Sometimes, some people are just so angry they want to share it with other people
- 18                 'look this [is
- 19      Cathy:                 [It's therapy, isn't
- 20   → Angela:                 [This is the only way they can get it out by telling everybody - some people go
- 21                 into themselves and not say anything where others wanna tell everybody - n' that's their
- 22                 way [of doin' it
- 23      Jana:       [tell everyone

24 → Cathy: Part of the healing process, in 'it?

[Focus group 24/7/97]

Lay experience therefore is marked by the revelation of private issues, which the women seem to regard as a very 'brave' thing to do (line 7). They talk in conventional popular therapy language in terms of 'getting it out' (line 20), which resonates with the 'talking cure', until Cathy even says 'its part of the healing process' (line 24). The women in the interviews replicated such a view, that being a lay member of these programmes was probably 'good for you' especially for people who need to talk. When talking about the phone-ins on the morning magazine programmes:

Helen: What do you think of the phone-ins?

Emma: Well, they do everything don't they? They cover it from like they've got every sort of person that can deal with all the different issues like what's her name-

Helen: Denise? [*This Morning's* agony aunt]

Emma: Denise and like they have those phone-ins where you can ring up and speak to any of them - that's a good idea and sometimes I think people who watch it really depend upon them and like think oh yeh I'm gonna ring Denise.

[Interview 7/7/98]

Eve: I think people just want to tell their problems to somebody don't they obviously sometimes if they're lonely and haven't got anybody to talk to they relate to them and they think they're quite nice to talk to.

[Interview 15/1/96]



In general, the women felt that 'lay' speakers on the programmes probably needed someone to talk to and empathized with their position. Again these responses echo Livingstone's findings as she suggests that, "there were a number of often quite lengthy attempts by women, but rarely if at all by men, to understand and empathise with the position being expressed" (1994:440). This can be understood in terms of the women's search for context and the generic distinctions related to gender which are similar to those found by soap opera researchers - that soap opera fans (mostly women) make paradigmatic readings of the genre focusing on the possibilities of narratives based around characters and events, whereas non-fans and critics (mostly men) make syntagmatic readings stressing the repetition of events and the lack of narrative conclusion (e.g. Allen, 1985). For Liebes and Katz (1990) the fans' reading would be described as a 'referential' rather than a critical reading of the genre whereby, "viewers relate to characters as real people and in turn relate these real people to their own real worlds" (1990:100).

### **7.5 Personal experience**

Livingstone claims that using audience responses in her study "allows for the grounding of these arguments [about the public sphere, the media and feminist theory] in the actual practices of everyday life" (1994:433). She does indeed compare the contextual, relational reasoning of the women to the men's more impersonal search for consensus, but in terms of 'positioning the self', Livingstone stops at the point of comparison. She does not pay a great deal of attention to the ways in which the women's own personal narratives, not only situate their arguments but are also part of the motivations for viewing.

In my study, personal experience is fundamental to the ways in which the women felt involved in the programmes. For instance, they often suggested that they use the programmes to make themselves feel better:

Cathy: Some of it's very helpful things that you didn't realise and some of it's really sad and I think some days if you're having a bit of a depressive day, ma:nic depressive, and you see something on there, I think it puts things in the right perspective.

[Interview 15/5/96]

Jenny reiterates a similar theme in her interview:

Helen: Do you think people like listening to other people's problems?

Jenny: erm yeh because they can relate to them ca::n't they really and think oh yeh I'm in that situation or I know someone in that situation a:nd if you have got a problem of your own and you're sitting there listening to it and you think o:h perhaps I'm not so bad after all you know cos these people ring in they've gotta be at the end of their tether ba:sically. Yeh I do like listening to other people's problems because it makes me think, oh well all I wanna do is lose a bit of weight you know what I mean, like I'm not financially in a mess you know and these people that are hard up and have their kids taken off em and all this business and you think it makes you feel better.

[Interview 25/1/96]

Notice in Jenny's description that she moves between the first person, 'I' and the third person 'you'. It seems to be clear that these programmes can be used as a space to compare and consider herself in relation to common experience. Everyday concerns can be measured against the 'sadness' that appears on the screen and be used to 'put things in the right perspective' or 'make yourself feel better'. The display of 'ordinary' people's personal

tragedies calls upon the viewers own senses of self to 'relate' - which was a common word in the women's discussions.

Many of the women, when explaining their relationship with this programming, talked about something from their own personal experience. Alice discusses how one of the issues on the programmes had significant bearing upon a tragic situation in her own life,

Alice: Because you learn a lot, because there's a lot about (.) oh gays and AIDS, diseases and I think one I saw was about suicide and an aw:ful lot of people commit suicide and its young me:n as well. Well its a:bsolutely horrifying cause [Michelle, her daughter] used to go out with a lad a couple of years ago and after they finished, and he finished with her, thank god but h::e committed suicide she was devastated cos I met him and he was a caring young man a vegetarian, a friend of the earth, save the whales, save the rainforest a to:tally like sensitive person and I think how terrible and then when I saw this *Kilroy* on a:ll these people who've committed suicide, oh dear you don't realise what a big problem it is.

[Interview 14/5/96]

The programmes can therefore be used to put personal experience into wider perspective, in contrast to Peck's (1995) suggestion that the talk show merely reduces social problems to individual psychological trauma. Many of the women say that they feel that they 'learn' from these programmes. I asked Cathy if she felt that the kind of information gleaned from these talk programmes was available anywhere else. Her reply was:

Cathy: You do pick it up but they're very few and far between, so when something like that comes on you tend to find a lot more that you can identify with because a newspaper article I think it maybe just covers the ba:sics but if you're listening to people who've actually got it and actually experienced



erm things (.) like he's [her son] got learning difficulties and he's at a special school and you listen to other children that have got the same but it doesn't say that in a newspaper so you get much more information from those sort of things really.

[Interview 15/5/96]

For all the popular debate about the influx of talk in a postmodern tabloid era, Cathy feels that these programmes offer one of the few places where experience is given such a platform. This might indeed be cheap television, but ordinary experience clearly has a personal value. In one of the interviews, Bette and I had just watched a broadcast of *The Time...The Place* about fathers' rights to see their children after separation. Talking about it was upsetting for Bette as she thought about her street and her own life:

Bette: I just switch on the ones [programmes] I know that are going to interest me. Probably because of all the sadness and all this we've watched this morning, you know young wives their bloody usbands ave buggered off and left them and you know typical in my own stree::t (.) its so sad and I think wh::y wh::y didn't you wait and erm in my own family (.) erm I don't think I would like this on tape [tape recorder is switched off as Bette talks about her childhood]

[Interview 12/6/96]

It seems that the women call upon their own personal experience when watching others do the same. In Chapter Five, I argued that the strategies in the programmes' discourse call upon viewers to make relationally significant correlations with their own lives. Some claim that it might make you 'feel better' but it also might be painful. Nonetheless, it is a contingent part of the viewing process. I asked Angela how she felt when people on the

programme got upset and she recalled an instance when it touched upon her own personal emotion:

Helen: How do you feel when people get upset?

Angela: That one the other day upset me. That woman who aborted the baby ten years ago (3) and there was one not long back on cry babies and she's a cry baby [gestures to her youngest daughter in the room] and they'd got this baby on that was really, re::ally crying and that upset me 'cos I got reminded me what she: was like and I nearly rang in then cos that- to say to that woman if she need someone to talk to (.) but I didn't.

[Interview 18/1/96]

This, I think, is what Polly meant earlier about the 'real' world. It is the world of direct relational experience. In the focus group discussion, I asked the women whether they thought the programmes were 'trivial', to which they said no. Jenny takes this further,

Helen: What stops them from being trivial?

Jenny: We::ll its too real isn't it to be trivial, they're using real people n' re::al issues.

[Interview 25/1/96]

This is the real domestic everyday world of women that is experienced in their material daily lives. Women's contextualisation of their own lived reality is central to the reasons for watching. Angela's relationship with this part of the programmes is completely embedded within her own experience. Subjectivity and textuality are undoubtedly entwined. The language of traditional media research somehow seems inadequate in this context. They are not 'decoding' signs or reading messages, but they are *relationally*

involved in the mediation of experience. Hence the women's repetition of the phrase, 'I can *relate* to that'.

## 7.6 Speaking personally as a group

As I have mentioned earlier, these findings are unusual in that I have presented lengthy CA transcripts of the women's discussion in the focus groups. This draws attention to their competences as speakers as well as to their views as informants. What is interesting is the turn-taking procedure that the women adopt in producing their readings of the texts as a group.

Transcribing this data was complicated due to the amount of simultaneous speech that the women produced. However, this was not to be interpreted as aggressive argument since the women were not aggressively interrupting each other. Rather, they were joining in each other's turns and producing overlapping speech which are elements of what Coates (1994, 1996) understands as co-operative speech between women friends where they utilise a 'shared floor'. For example, here the women jointly produce a comparison of the talk programmes with magazine problem pages as a gendered form:

- |   |           |   |
|---|-----------|---|
| 1 | Cathy:    | Men don't like discussing any of that though do they?                                     |
| 2 | Angela:   | Not mine though, he'll read mine, 'e likes reading my magazines, heh, heh, 'e wouldn't    |
| 3 |           | go buy one  |
| 4 | Patricia: | Well, that's it y'see [Jo's] in the sixth form and she ses boys always 'ave the magazines |
| 5 | →         | n' read out all the er problem=   |
| 6 | → Jenny:  | =[problem pages   |



7 → Cathy: = [problems, yeh

Jenny and Cathy both latch on to Patricia's turn, without a gap and simultaneously produce the key issue which men apparently find both intriguing and embarrassing, 'problems'. And in the next example notice how the overlapping of the women's turns helps produce the reading of the talk show as talking therapy:

1           Jana:         Sometimes some people are [just so angry they want to share it with other  
2           Cathy:    [It's therapy, isn't  
3           Jana:         people, 'look this [is-  
4 → Angela:    [This is the only way they can get it out by telling everybody - some  
5    people go into themselves and not say anything where others wanna tell everybody - n'  
6    that's their way [of doin' it  
7 → Jana:    [Tell everyone  
8           Cathy:         Part of the healing process, in 'it?

At line 4 it is as though Angela is finishing Jana's turn and at line 23 Jana responds by overlapping and reinforcing Angela's point, 'tell everyone'. This concept of a *shared* floor, rather than a speaker/hearer dynamic assuming only one speaker at a time that is the usual framework in CA's 'turn-taking' systematics (Sacks et. al., 1974), becomes particularly crucial to Chapter Eight of this thesis in the analysis of para-social interaction.

## 7.7 Para-social involvement

Personal experience is vital to the women's contextual relationship with these programmes, but I would suggest that this is fostered by the text's para-social organization as discussed

in earlier chapters. I tried to ask the women whether they felt this kind of involvement, which often proved quite difficult. However, during the conversations, they did make suggestions related to this area of my study, if not always when I was most directly trying to elicit them. In the next sections, I explore the women's responses to the terms of para-social interaction that I have discussed in previous chapters - the feeling of 'knowing' the personalities and the appeals to participation.

### 7.7.1 Personalities and private lives

As I discussed in Chapter Four, all of these programmes are based around personalities, even *This Morning* and *Good Morning* become unofficially termed 'Richard and Judy' and 'Ann and Nick'. Much of the women's discussion about why they like the programmes is about how they like the personalities:

Angela: John Stapleton he seems just a ki:nd, honest man, I don't know he just seems very compassionate towards- he gets very emotional I suppose and he's got no airs and graces about him. He handles people well. I think he's re:ally good.

[Interview 18/1/96]

Angela's comments, as all the women's, are based upon personal qualities not professional ones. When I ask Sandra about how she likes the structure of the programme, she instantly turns to consider the presenters not the content:

Sandra: I think it's quite good I mean there's things I don't agree with because of my personal views on things but I think they handle it lovely, I personally think they're good they're very good. I think they're

natural and ordinary and put people at ease [...] I think they're nice they're not stuffy-I mean you used to get the David Frosts and the- but the::se are just nice ordinary people.

[Interview 16/1/96]

This mention of 'ordinariness' relates to Langer's (1981) argument about the television personality as opposed to the film star. But there's another distinction here - Richard and Judy are not like David Frost another older TV personality - they are members of a breed of TV personality that is even more 'ordinary'. This distinction is difficult for Sandra to explain as I press her on what she sees as the difference:

Helen: What's the difference then between them and someone like David Frost?

Sandra: Well their to:o I dunno how to explain it but he's too black and white in my opinion whereas they are more (.) I can't explain really they're sort of people I could approach and speak to whereas I put barriers with someone like him, like on *Question Time* I can't watch it.

[Interview 16/1/96]

The way in which I interpret this is that the pleasures derived from watching *This Morning* are related again to the orality of the programme and the feminist arguments about the engendering of public debate - not 'black and white' (masculine) but the 'sort of people I could approach' (feminine). It is the feeling of intimacy that is encouraged by the textual para-social relations that assists in making morning talk different to formal debate.

Interestingly the programme *Question Time*, a more formal late night political discussion programme, is often referred to as the antithesis of daytime talk. In the focus group the women begin to compare David Dimbleby and Robin Day (presenters of *Question Time*) with Kilroy:



1 Sandra: Ooh they're just not the same are they?

2 → Cathy: Kilroy's got more charisma, I mean I thi=

3 Patricia: = I'd like to see Kilroy on that, on that

4 programme.

5 Others: heh,heh

6 Jana: Dimbleby's just there 'e's got no personality as ['e really?

7 → Cathy: [you couldn't warm to 'im at all could

8 ya?

8 → Sandra: Well, he [doesn't move around like Kilroy does.

10 Patricia: [No, well he (.) 'cos like he's - not got an opinion as [Polly] ses, Kilroy as

11 got an opinion, didn't ya? David Dimbleby's just [re::ally there to

12 Others: [mmm, mmm

13 Patricia: say that [Mrs so and so its their question and 'you can answer it first',

14 Sandra: [that's right

15 Others: yeh, yeh

16 Patricia: 'alright you've said enough', 'lets have you'. He's really there just to keep

17 control [in't 'e?

18 Jana: [But Robin Day was like that but he's got more=

19 Patricia: = yeh, but he could be very

20 cutting couldn't 'e?

21 Jana: yeh

22 → Sandra: But Kilroy's different, 'e's moving around the people.

[Focus group 24/7/97]

For these women, there is a fundamental difference between the presenters of daytime and nighttime talk. Dimbleby is described as being more formal and methodical whilst Robin

Day is 'cutting' and harsh. On the other hand Kilroy's spatially moving around the lay people in the studio is important (lines 8 and 22) and he is deemed to have more 'charisma' (line 2). The women's discussion suggests a relationship that is more intimate than Livingstone and Lunt's description of the host acting as 'hero' figure. One of the most interesting observations on Dimbleby is that 'you couldn't warm to him at all could ya?' (line 7). It seems to me that these personalities are being compared upon their para-social potential, their ability to form a relationship with the women.

Cathy reiterates this in her interview with me:

Cathy: I think he's [Kilroy] sensitive erm when he saw that lady was upset he was holding her hand and squeezing her arm (.) I think he tries very hard to give people a fair say and he doesn't erm let somebody hog the limelight erm I do think he's good. I think he tends to pick up on everything. I think he's quite gentlemanly [...] I think it depends upon him because I think he's quite warming and I think he's the sort of man that you could- I think he's got a sort of funny happy face so you could talk to him.

[Interview 15/5/96]

Again Cathy's appreciation of Kilroy is evaluated in terms of his compassion and her *own* perceived ability to be able to talk to him. The potential to 'talk' becomes central to the enjoyment of these programmes.

The word 'compassionate' surfaces in the women's descriptions quite often. In dealing with 'real' people, the hosts of these shows are seen to display empathy and appear caring towards their guests. Judy Finnegan was seen to be particularly compassionate:

Patricia: I think she [Judy] can be very compassionate, y'know when you get situations like mothers with children that they've had difficulties or problems and I think he [Richard] genuinely does feel. I think as a mother herself of little ones she can associate and I think he does feel- feel for them.

[Focus group 24/7/97]

Empathy, or being able to 'associate', is described by Patricia in terms of the sharing of experience. Judy's role as a mother is significant to her ability to care. Their 'ordinariness' is marked by reference to their personal and familial relationships, as Angela says about Richard and Judy:

Angela: I think they're very down to earth. I think you can relate to them. They seem ordinary people [...] They talk about their families don't they? It makes them humans. Its not just people who sit there- and lets face it we're all nosy and like to know what's going on aren't we? People share their lives with them, why shouldn't they share their lives with you? Cos they do tell you about their problems.

[Interview 18/1/96]

Ordinariness can be characterized by the revealing of their lives and problems in the domestic world which resonates with the women's own experience. Angela discusses it as a fair exchange, which is reminiscent of debates about objectivity in interviewing. Oakley (1982) suggests that reciprocity is a key feature of interviewing women, rather than the distanced observer who asks detached questions. What Angela is pointing to is one of the ways in which the magazine programmes utilize a more subjective approach that is part of its gendered appeal.





23 like she'll say 'tut, why do they 'ave to bring the family in? We don't wanna know'.  
24 They talk as though they're=  
25 Angela: = Yeh, its - they talk about how they go 'ome 'n 'e gets the  
26 dinner on n' y'know,  
27 heh, heh, heh  
28 Others: [...]  
Well I quite like it n' I quite like Richard. I quite like 'em both, yes. I think they're a  
29 Sandra: lovely team and they work well together n' I think its wonderful to be able to work with  
30 your 'usband if you can. I'd like to work with mine if possible. (.) I used to work with my  
31 'usband, that's where I met 'im. We fall out now but when we were young and in love we  
32 didn't s'[much n'then they get on yer nerves a bit don't they?  
33 [heh, heh, heh  
34 Others:  
[Focus group 24/7/97]

One can observe in this extract that liking to watch the programmes does not necessarily mean that the women do not have critical and sometimes negative views of the programmes. Many of the women voiced objections to Richard as patronizing or smarmy, but they all liked Judy. However, unlike the para-social indicator of attractiveness in the PSI scale discussed in Chapter Six, *not* finding someone attractive does not necessarily detract from the para-social experience. They talk about the personalities in the same way in which one might talk about acquaintances. Again Sandra's assessment is based upon her personal experience as she recalls meeting her husband at work.

Pleasure, here, is derived from watching the husband and wife relationship played out on the screen, as 'he leans to her' for instance and as the couple mention their family and what





- 11 Sandra: nature in't it with your 'us [band.
- 12 Patricia: [Everybody doesn't want to know about us!' - she'll say,
- 13 sometimes to 'im, won't she?=  
14 Jana: = She'll always say when she's at fault.
- 15 Sandra: That's natural in't it, yeh, I think so, I think they're [lovely.
- 16 Angela: [I think the look she gives 'im is
- 17 definitely natural. I think 'ooh poor'-
- 18 Sandra: Well, you do that's how ya react to your 'usband, don't ya? [- I mean
- 19 [heh,heh,heh
- 20 Patricia: he'll say sometimes that Judy's looking at me, won't he, he'll say that yeh.
- 21 Sandra: If my 'usband ses something personal I'd say 'shurup', wouldn't you?

[Focus group 24/7/98]

The details of being 'like us' are part of the involvement that the women feel in a para-social relationship with the presenters which probably also motivates the evaluations based upon whether or not you could talk to them. This leads me to the possibility of actual participatory conversational para-social interaction.

### 7.7.2 Mediated conversational interaction

I never asked the women directly about interacting with the television since I felt that it would seem rather leading. Throughout the research I found this question difficult since I had come across much cynicism in the general discussions I had had with friends and colleagues about my research. One of the discussions in the focus groups sums up a common position on women's involvement in daytime television. This discussion occurred



25 → Jana: [No  
26 Polly: [No  
27 Sandra: [No  
28 Others: heh,heh,heh  
29

[Focus group 24/7/97]

This extract is interesting and, no doubt, influenced by the dynamics of the group. The women suggest that these programmes are useful if you are 'desperate' or 'have nobody' (line 6) and even equate it with ringing the Samaritans (lines 10 and 13). The people who use these programmes are 'other' people who have 'got nobody' (lines 7 and 8) (and yet all the women report regularly watching these programmes since it was a pre-requisite for them being involved in the study). Polly says 'that's *their* friend in the home' (line 15/16) - the para-social relationship belongs to someone else. Ultimately, Patricia recalls her daughter's description of people who ring in - 'they're saddos' (line 22).

Although the women suggest empathy with people in need, they were also careful to suggest that that need was not their own, as a chorus of voices say 'no' to my question about whether they would participate. Notice that Angela, who had previously, in her interview with me alone, described the details of an incident where she had thought of phoning in, is silent. This says something about the nature of the focus group and what it might hide if it were the only method of audience research, but the extract also points to the women's awareness of popular conceptions of participation in these genres - 'saddo's' - people who have no friends. It is also interesting that these remarks have a striking resemblance to the



assumptions upon which the PSI scale is based and reveals that such a scale simply reflects popular prejudice rather than the 'scientific' rationale that it claims.

These women belong to an integrated group of friends, but I needed to be careful that they would not perceive me, as a researcher, as having made similar judgments. I was very sensitive to this discussion that the women were having and I did not want to prejudice what might happen when I watched the programmes with them. I tried, therefore, to ask questions about how they felt 'involved' by the programmes in an attempt to elicit their own description of any para-social relationship. In the interviews with the women alone some of them did gesture towards an actual para-social relationship. Sandra, suggested that Richard and Judy break across the barrier of the screen:

Helen: What do you think of the way they speak to the audience, to you at home?

Sandra: Very ordinary, very, as if they are talking to you in your lounge and not in front of a television camera that's what I think is so nice with them.

[Interview 16/1/96]

Sandra feels that it is as though the camera is not there, which suggests that for her the spectator/performer distinction is eroded. The element of 'performance' seems absent for the viewer within this feeling of the 'ordinary' and 'down-to-earthness'. Eve points to the gendered nature of this experience:

Helen: On this programme they have some really personal things on don't they?

Eve: I think to a woman it's like having a really good natter to a friend in't it and listening really in a way and- don't you think so?

[Interview 15/1/96]

## **Conclusion.**

In this chapter, I have given the reader some background into how the women perceive their practice of watching morning television. I have also situated their responses with earlier research into women's domestic consumption of the media in the home (as discussed in Chapter One), as well as more specifically with research into the gendered perceptions of participatory programming (discussed in Chapter Three). The gendered nature of this genre is related not to the fact/fiction distinction that is the common assumption from the tradition of media research, but to the rational/relational distinction about moral 'debate', which occurs in feminist arguments about the public sphere. I have argued that the women's emphasis on context and personal experience is connected to the para-social investments encouraged by the text that I outlined in Chapter Five. Therefore 'talk' and 'experience' are inextricably linked in the mediated experience as the women refer to the presenters as 'someone you could talk to'. This revelation presents an interesting affirmation of my original 'hunch' about the communicative status of this kind of programming, which I suggest encourages new kinds of mediated interaction through its construction of talk for a gendered audience at home.

Accordingly, I have also presented the women as speakers, not just as informants, whereby, as a group they finish each other's sentences and constantly speak simultaneously with one another. This is different to how most focus group findings are presented as they separate

statements for analysis mostly in terms of content. Here, orality and speech are central to the communicative experience of viewing such programmes. Mass communication and interpersonal communication are influenced by each other and yet rarely do we research them as such. In the next chapter therefore I present findings which suggest that each can inform the study of the other.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **Talking Back: Analysis of Audience Responses as Para-social Interaction.**

#### **Introduction**

So far, I have argued that morning talk based programming constructs a world in which ordinary, real world and real time experience is embedded within the 'show'. It relies on implied 'feminine' knowledge through the build up of 'sociable', para-social relationships which assumes an imagined community of women as the central focus of its communicative intention. In the last chapter, the women described their relationship with these texts in terms that echoed the textual analysis - demonstrating that the appeals are related to the construction of a 'feminine', intimate and personal knowledge combined with a co-spatial feeling of being able to 'talk' to the presenters.

In Chapter Six, I made an argument for analysing the audience's interaction with the text at the moment of viewing to better understand any communicative relationship between audience and text. I focus now on how this conversational dimension allows an interactive strategy with its audience. Whilst it may be obvious to assert that morning talk programmes utilise conversational norms that are more usually associated with everyday conversation, that is their sociable imperative, rather than an institutionally shaped speech style, and that the discussion invites the 'ordinary' lay person's narrative, it is still necessary to address the fact that these discourses *are* generated by an institutionally regulated space of broadcasting which is mediated through broadcasting technology across space and time.

What is interesting here is the question of how these seemingly ordinary conversational norms are appropriated across the broadcasting medium. This relates to the 'double articulation' (Scannell,1991) of talk produced from within the institutional framework of the television studio that is received and consumed within the home.

It is my intention therefore, in this chapter to present and analyse the data produced from audio recording the women's utterances whilst they watched these morning programmes, identifying patterns in the data that represent interactive exchanges. In this chapter therefore, is a coming together of the kinds of data that have traditionally been kept separate in media research, that is, the textual dynamics of what occurs in the studio are considered alongside the immediate responses of viewers in the home. In CA terms, I have a curiously constructed 'floor' - one which stretches across time and space - where co-presence is not essential. Therefore, before I present and examine the data, this concept of 'floor' requires some theoretical attention.

### **8.1 Some constraints within Conversation Analysis**

One problem for this type of analysis into para-social interaction with a mediated text, lies within CA's unitary conception of the speaker/hearer dynamic. In Sacks et.al.'s (1974) 'Simplest Systematics', the 'model' turn-taking strategy of interaction suggests that one is either at one time or another either a 'speaker' or 'hearer' as though each offers a distinctive role which is clearly demarcated in conversation. Against this, as we saw in Chapter Four, Goffman's (1981) essay on 'Footing' allows for a more fluid and multi-faceted exploration of the roles that a participant can occupy at any one time and opens up the narrow polarity

of such a speaker/hearer dynamic. For instance, he suggests that we may not even be actively listening to a conversation and yet have a place in the talk, or conversely we may have no interactive place in the talk at all, and yet be listening. Much talk takes place surrounded by bystanders who may or may not have a part in the interaction. For Goffman, therefore, "the relations(s) among speaker, addressed recipient, and unaddressed recipients are complicated, significant and not much explored"(1981:133). Rather, Goffman's approach allows us a more flexible range of 'participation status' whereby:

an utterance does not carve up the world beyond the speaker into precisely two parts, recipients and non-recipients, but rather opens up an array of structurally differentiated possibilities, establishing the participation framework in which the speaker will be guiding his [*or her*] delivery.  
(1981:137)

Utilising the idea of a participation *framework* allows us a wider field in which we can describe the kinds of interaction that take place across the broadcasting medium, produced in one space and received in a multitude of other spaces, by different kinds of receivers with different interactive investments at different moments in time.

A related problem is the concept of 'floor'. In conversation analysis a speaker can 'take' or 'resign' the floor in conversational exchange. Ownership of the floor therefore belongs only to one current speaker and 'turn-taking' assumes a general normative framework. There has been criticism from other quarters of this basic turn-taking model established in CA.

Fairclough (1992) is critical of conversational analysis for its privileging of the 'turn-taking' system as *the* fundamental matrix which organises interaction. In this way, he argues that



CA retains a 'model' of interaction which ignores the fact that social, cultural and power relational factors affect the language exchange between speakers. Other critics have included feminist linguists interested in the conversational discourse of women's groups (Cameron and Coates, 1988; Coates, 1993; 1994; 1996 and Talbot, 1998).

In the essay, 'No gaps, lots of overlap: Turn taking patterns in the talk of women friends', Coates (1994) suggests that the CA model is in need of reconceptualisation to account for lived social encounters. She emphasises that, "turn-taking is not just a mechanical procedure for speakers, but carries social meaning and is expressive of social relationships" (1994:177). Sacks et. al.'s (1974) work indeed assumes a system for interaction in which the 'model' implies a desired mode of ordered conversation in which there would be no gaps and no overlaps present in the exchanges. This has been generally recognised as a normative model in English-speaking communities. The presence of gaps or overlaps is usually considered as signifying conversational malfunction (Zimmerman and West, 1975) and Coates (1994) comments that even from an early age we are made aware of such an organising principle as we are told to wait our turn and not to interrupt.

For Coates the key difference between the normative turn taking model and women's talk is in the space where the 'no gaps' should occur. In the CA 'no gap' rule there is no lapse at the end of a turn constructional unit - at the end of a speakers turn,<sup>1</sup> and the speaker and the turn are coextensive. However, in Coates' analysis she suggests that turns can be jointly produced by a number of participants (as we saw in Chapter Seven). This could mean that

one speaker could finish another speaker's turn or more complexly, that a single turn could be co-operatively constructed through a multitude of utterances.

Coates shows us the possibility of turns not necessarily being tied to the speaker but being jointly owned. Instead of CA's terminology of 'competing for' 'gaining' or 'resigning the floor' she suggests that in all female conversation there is the possibility of a concept of a 'shared floor'.<sup>2</sup> However, it is important here to recall the discussion in Chapter Two of this thesis, that whilst some authors see the co-operatively constructed floor as a specifically 'feminine' competence, Cameron (1998) shows how this can also be employed by males in certain contexts. Therefore, we must be reminded that traditionally culturally constructed 'masculine' and 'feminine' modes of speaking are 'performances' (Butler, 1990) which are brought into play in particular *contextual* encounters.

A further complicating factor however, for this research, is that the concept of the shared floor extends across social spaces, both public and private. That is to say that this is a *mediated* floor where the interaction is para-social. I must therefore critically consider patterns of turn taking in relation to the specificities of the social context. In particular, I must also pay close attention to the genre of this type of broadcasting, the gendered specificity of these forms of television texts and their address to female viewers, as well as to their consumption within the culturally inscribed domestic context. If we acknowledge such a contextual matrix in the scenario of mediated communication, then, the

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<sup>1</sup> Goffman (1981) also points to the weakness in this rule. He suggests that it is usual to assume that to sustain involvement participants often ensure that there is no prolonged period of time where no-one takes the floor, "but equally there can be no talk occurring yet the participants can still be in a state of talk." (1980:130)

<sup>2</sup> Carole Edelsky (1981) in 'Who's Got the Floor?' first suggested that we need to distinguish between two different kinds of 'floor' the *singly developed* and the *collaboratively developed* floor.



conversational interaction between the gendered generic context (text) and its discursively gendered consumption (women audiences) becomes particularly interesting. Moreover, the complexities of contextual matrices are questions that have largely been ignored in the study of broadcast discourse.

## **8.2 Para-social interaction**

I will present here the findings of this part of the research in terms of the women's para-social engagements with the television text. The transcriptions of the data take into account both parts of the mediated conversation and the speech exchanges which occur both in the studio and simultaneously at home during the broadcasts. They have been produced through the careful transcription of the events occurring in the studio, alongside the transcription of the women's responses in the home as they view, in an attempt to identify any verbal para-social communicative process at work. The transcriptions themselves follow the established conventions within CA which are delineated in the Appendix.

The transcripts suggested that there are indeed actual moments where the women interacted directly with the text which cannot directly be explained by my presence there as an observer. In the first instance the transcriptions reveal audience responses that appear to be immediately occasioned by the text as the primary recipient, as if the women were engaging in direct face-to-face communication. Further, these responses are produced in relation to the text or with the text as a pre-text where my presence is taken into account. The utterances produced by the women can then be categorised in terms of three stages



which the women pass through at different moments during their viewing experience. I suggest these are primary, secondary and tertiary levels of interaction with the text.

The first *primary* responses, I suggest, are indicative of direct interactive exchanges with the programmes' texts which fit neatly with norms of turn-taking in non-mediated interaction. The *secondary* level of interaction I suggest is indicative of the women beginning to interrogate and re-formulate the text for themselves. Finally the *tertiary* level of engagement is where the women use the text occurring in the studio to make evaluations about their own lives and often insert their own narratives in relation to the textual discourse. The tertiary level is where my presence as a researcher plays a larger role in the participation framework.

I do not wish to imply that the viewer is any more or less involved in any of these stages but that they are indicative of different kinds of responses - some which involve direct conversational engagement with the text and others which involve personal revelation for which I become the 'primary addressee'. Since almost all of the women use all three of the stages I would propose that some investment in stages one or two often precedes engagement in stage three. It is also important to note that often utterances are complex and difficult to categorise. As the data will reveal, some responses present instances which span categories and these often provide the most interesting data.

8.2.1 Primary responses

Instances of this primary level of interaction can be recognised in at least three ways in the data by the viewers':

- i. Using second person pronouns, directed at a participant (or voice of a participant in the case of phone-ins) in the studio,
- ii. Using 'minimal responses', 'news receipts' or 'response tokens' (yeh, mhm, etc.)
- iii. Completing 'turn construction units':
  - a. using adjacency pairs - responding to greetings and answering questions
  - b. jointly constructing a turn.

*i. Second person pronouns*

The use of second person pronouns is a useful basis on which to clarify the primary level of responses which are significant to a para-social conversational exchange. The use of the second person pronoun identifies a studio participant as the 'primary addressee' for the viewer at home. In these instances, although I am present, I am clearly not the primary addressee - (this is not always the case as will become apparent in later shifts in the women's discourse).

Extract 1

[Angela /'This Morning' 18/1/96, 'fertility' phone-in]

	Studio	Home
1	Richard	Ok well listen (1) let's start with
2		some real calls here. Let's start out
3		with Victoria who's 25 years old if
4		you don't mind me saying Vicky

5                    calling from Buckinghamshire  
6    Victoria    Hello  
7    Richard    Hello, now how long have you been  
8                    trying to get pregnant?  
9    Victoria    erm about eighteen months now.           Angela    You've told us now

**Extract 2**  
**[Sandra/ *This Morning* 16/1/96 'Dilemmas' phone-in ]**

		Studio		Home
1.	Judy	He's to:ld you that unless you agree		
2		to a termination the relationship's		
3		over?		
4	Richard	And you're out of the flat or house	Sandra	You've got a dilemma over THAT!
5		that you live in?		

**Extract 3**  
**[Emma/*This Morning* 7/7/98 'Sex problems' phone-in with Dr. Ruth Westheimer]**

		Studio		Home
1	Dr.Ruth	Amanda what you have to do is to		
2		first <u>learn</u> like to today to gi:ve		
3		yourself an orgasm touch the clitoris		
4		think of some ve:ry sexy thoughts		
5		maybe put a sexy movie on	Emma	You ca::n't come out with <u>that</u> .

These examples of viewers' use of second person pronouns all identify their primary addressee, but also appear as commentaries on whatever it is the 'you' has just said. The next example (4) appears as a directive, as though the 'you' could indeed respond.



**Extract 4**  
**[Eve/ Vanessa 16/1/96 chat show about 'jealousy']**

	Studio	Home
1.	Woman	I just wanna say <u>one</u> thing it takes
2		two to play tonsil tennis it's not <u>just</u>
3		the woman's fault
4		<u>he's</u> doin it as well    Eve    Oh shut up <u>you::!</u>
5		I mean it takes two of em

Obviously the viewer here does not expect a response to her demand but the point is that she has contributed such a remark *as though* the exchange is reciprocal and as though they are co-present. In the next example, although Sandra does not use the second person pronoun, she still issues a directive to the caller on the 'phone-in', *as though* she could respond, clearly indicating that the caller is the primary addressee.

**Extract 5**  
**[Sandra/ This Morning 16/1/96, 'dilemmas' phone-in. Caller Jane has called in because her partner has given her an ultimatum to have a termination or end their relationship]**

	Studio	Home
1.	Jane	I can't- I just don't know what to do
2	Judy	And are you planning to marry
3		anyway. If this hadn't happened
4		would you be planning to get
5		married?
6	Jane	Well we are engaged -its been
7		nearly a year we've been engaged
8		now
9	Denise	Is he saying you must terminate <u>this</u> Sandra    Send him packing!
10		pregnancy, or that he never intends

These first examples then, establish the way in which the viewers at home are actually taking part in conversation that is directed at speaker(s) in the studio, as though they are co-present, and they foreground the concept of the 'para-social' as reciprocated by the audience. In the next extracts we begin to see how these contributions from the viewers at home can be understood in terms of conversational imperatives.

*ii. Minimal responses to studio talk*

The viewers in my study all, at various points throughout watching the programme, produce minimal responses to the talk occurring in the studio. 'Minimal responses' (sometimes called 'response tokens' or 'news receipts' ) are usually utterances like 'mhm', 'yeah', 'right' etc. (Montgomery,1986). They perform the function of signalling the speaker's presence and involvement in the conversation taking place. In these terms, all the women at home express involvement in the interaction occurring in the studio. Here are just a few examples:

**Extract 6**

[Bette/ *'The Time... The Place'* , 12/6/96, discussion programme on 'fathers rights'.]

		Studio		Home
1	Woman	No matter <u>how</u> old they are if the		
2		father lets them down, if the fa:ther		
3		has a problem- children make up		
4		their own		
5		Minds	Bette	Mhm

**Extract 7**

[Alice/ Kilroy, 14/5/96, discussion programme on 'care for the elderly']

		Studio		Home
1	Man	Its not a question of <u>luck</u> it's a		
2.		question of responsibility		
3	Woman	Some people don't even earn that		
4		much money in wee:k		
5	Man	Its a question of <u>modern</u> da:y	Alice	Right!
6		responsibility		

The examples above suggest straightforward acknowledgement of information but the following examples can be seen as more active reactions to the discussion taking place in the studio:

**Extract 8**

[Jenny/ *Good Morning* 25/1/96 'D.I.Y' phone in]

		Studio		Home
1	Caller	erm right I've got a problem with my		
2		polystyrene coving		
3		erm I've	Jenny	Ooo::h [sarcastically]
4		bought it and I haven't got a clue		
5.		<u>how</u> I'm going to cut it to size		

**Extract 9**

[Cathy/ Kilroy 15/5/96, discussion programme on 'police misconduct']

		Studio		Home
1.	Kilroy	...you were put in a police cell		
2	Woman	a cell yes [begins to get upset] with		
3		my=		



4	Kilroy	=wi- with your three and a half		
5		year old son (.)		
6		you were locked in a	Cathy	Oh Go:d!
7		police cell.		

**Extract 10**

**[Myra/The Time... The Place 20/5/96 discussion programme on 'female sterilisation']**

		Studio	Home
1.	Woman	...I had periods before me	
2		operation but after me operation not	
3		I didn't have one=	
4	John	= so they said 'oh its an infection	
5		everthing'll come full circle but it	
6		wasn't you found out=	
7	Woman	=in October=	
8	John	=that you had=	
9	Woman	= that I was pregnant	
10		with twins-	
11	John	and that you'd been pregnant with	
12		twins-	
13	Woman	I was two months pregnant=	
14	John	=when	
15		you had the operation=	
16	Woman	=when I had	
17		the operation	
18	Audience	.hh.hh..hhh	Myra Good God!

This kind of response while watching television seems fairly unremarkable and what one expects from common sense knowledge about watching discussion programmes. However, thinking about such 'minimal responses' in terms of speech style illuminates their significance.

Sociolinguistic 'dominance' research on the use of minimal responses showed that women use them more often than men which indicates the listener's support for the current speaker (e.g. Zimmerman and West, 1975 and Fishman, 1980). Indeed, in Fishman's paper she discusses women's use of 'minimal responses' as part of their 'interactional shitwork' in which they engage in the maintenance of conversation in mixed groups whereby there is a division of interactional labour "which supports men and women in positions of power and powerlessness" (Coates, 1993:116). However, Coates' research on all female speech groups suggests a re-evaluation of minimal responses against the grain of reading women's speech actions negatively. She suggests that in all-female groups the establishment of a shared *collaborative* floor means that minimal responses say, "I am here, this is my floor too, and I am participating in the shared construction of talk" (Coates, 1996:143). Such cues indicate what Coates (1993) refers to as 'active listenership' which she suggests is more commonly a trait of all-female conversation:

Through signalling the active participation of all participants in the conversation, minimal responses play a significant role in the collaborative construction of text and of the maintenance of a collaborative floor. (Coates 1996:145)

Concepts such as 'active listenership' and 'the collaborative construction of text' are significant in terms of my interviewees' responses to the *mediated* text and are ideas that I want to keep at the fore of the analysis of their other verbal contributions whilst watching.

### *iii. Completing a 'turn constructional unit'*

Completing a turn constructional unit is another way of showing active participation in talk. This can take on different forms such as answering a question or finishing another speaker's utterance.

#### *iii. a. Adjacency pairs*

One of the ways in which the viewer at home might complete a turn constructional unit within this shared floor is by engaging in 'adjacency pairs'. In conversation certain classes of utterances conventionally come in pairs - for instance greetings and return greetings, questions and answers and acceptances/declinations. Sacks (1992) identifies the way in which such utterances are *ordered*, "that is there is a recognisable difference between first parts and second parts of the pair; and in which given first pair parts require particular second parts (or a particular range of seconds)" (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998:39).

Adjacency pairs establish both a normative framework for displaying sense-making of each others' talk and also accomplish actions - sociable greetings, answering questions.

According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), "This shows that talk-in interaction is not just a matter of taking turns but is a matter of accomplishing *actions*" (my emphasis).

### *Responding to Greetings*

As discussed in Chapter Five, the morning programmes all open and close with traditional conversational greetings as though the presenter is co-present with the viewer at home - part of the 'synthetic personalisation' I outlined in Chapter Five. In my data only one of the women actually takes up the position of responding with the appropriate second pair part.



**Extract 11**

**[Bette/*The Time The Place* 12/6/96 discussion programme on 'fathers rights']**

		Studio		Home
		[Opening of programme introductory music and audience applause]		
1	John S	Thanks very much indeed, thankyou		
2		Hello:: good morning to		
3		you at home	Bette	No, thank <u>you</u>
4		well we all know in this country that		Good morning.
5		sadly one in three marriages end in		
6		divorce...		

In the extract above Bette responds to John Stapleton's 'thank you' for the applause, by saying, 'no, thank you', notice the stress on 'you'. She then responds to the 'Good morning' greeting with the appropriate response that one might use in face-to-face communication. This did not occur in any of the other interviews but I do not think that this can be observed as a quantitative limitation in the data. The only way to interpret this is qualitatively, through my knowledge of 'being there'. It is obvious from the tape that here Bette is being sarcastic, playing with the conventions that she is aware exist within these programmes of speaking to us 'as though we are there'. Bette is knowingly responding to the game. The fact that none of the other women do this, I would suggest, is because they recognise that to 'talk to the television' in such an obvious way might seem ridiculous, but Bette works around this by mocking the conversational invitation.

Answering Questions

Although the women do not on the whole take up the usual greeting response in adjacency pairs they do however take up others. Once the programme has begun and the women become involved in the *content* of the show they all, without exception, answer questions that are asked in the studio:

Extract 12

[Bette/ *The TimeThe Place* 12/6/96, discussion programme on 'fathers rights']

		Studio		Home
1	John S	That's a fair point isn't it Gillian if		
2		youngsters are subject this		
3		emo:tional roller coaster it is		
4		arguable that they're better off with		
5		<u>one</u> stable parent, isn't it? Or with a		
6		stable relationship?		
7	woman	I think, I think...	Bette	yeah!

Extract 13

[Alice/ 'Kilroy', 14/5/96, discussion programme on 'care for the elderly']

		Studio		Home
1	Kilroy	But <u>is</u> compu:lsory insurance the		
2		way so that e:verybody has to take		
3		out insurance in the future?		
4	Man	No, <u>no</u> you've <u>inserted</u> the word		
5		compulsory at the moment and		
6		there's <u>no</u> thing in these proposals		
7		that talks about compulsory		
8		insurance.		
9	Kilroy	<u>Should</u> it be compulsory?		
10	Man	I personally think...	Alice	<u>I::</u> think it should be.

# Extract 14

[Bette/ *The Time The Place* 12/6/96 discussion programme on 'father rights']

	Studio	Home
1. John S	Lets <u>ju</u> st go to the back row and make the point perhaps, in fai::rness to dads because it's <u>not</u> always the dads who are the disruptive figure you know I mean <u>mums</u> could be the disruptive figure too, yes?	
Man	That's right yeh, I've got <u>two</u> daughters she's er nearly six and the other one's two...	Bette No, they ca::n't!

Answering a question often involves more than simply agreeing or disagreeing with an utterance. It is often followed by the assertion of an opinion that may indeed challenge the discussion as it occurs within the television studio.

# Extract 15

[Alice/ Kilroy 14/5/96 discussion programme on 'care for the elderly']

	Studio	Home
1 Kilroy	Should we be helped to keep them	
2	at home?	
3 woman	Well that's preferable absolutely but	Alice Yes it <u>is</u> preferable really isn't it
4	on the other hand its not always	you've still got your dignity
5	possible	

Alice answers Kilroy's questions as though she were taking part in the studio debate and she also offers her subsequent justification for her answer, 'you've still got your dignity' (line 4).



Extract 16

[Cathy/ Kilroy 15/5/96 discussion programme on 'police misconduct']

		Studio		Home
1	Kilroy	Jonathon, <u>ar::e</u> the police racist?		
2.	Jonathon	I think in <u>some</u> cases the police are	Cathy	<u>I:</u> think so. I don't think they're <u>all</u>
3		<u>very</u> racist but like in other cases it		racist but I think <u>some</u> of them are.
4		all sort of depends how you sort of		
5		ta::lk to the police. I think if you		
6		talk to the police with an attitude		

In the example above, despite Kilroy clearly having addressed his question to Jonathon (line 1) Cathy takes up her turn reply (at line 3) even though Jonathon's reply is in progress. Thus, across the medium of broadcasting a shared floor can give the viewer at home space to formulate their own direct response to the conversational exchanges occurring in the studio. The issue of 'primary addressee', as usually established in conversational analysis, is complicated here since Cathy's response as 'lay' person, within the conventions of the genre, is equally valid. Here we see the 'double articulation' of broadcasting truly being utilised in both its attributes - as both the studio addressee and the home addressee respond simultaneously. This is suggestive of more than 'active listenership', rather, it is a clear indication of direct participation.

Extract 17

[Sandra/This Morning 16/1/96 discussion segment with Richard and Judy and Prince Philip's biographer]

		Studio		Home
1	Judy	Maybe the difference is the way the		
2		Queen rode <u>out</u> any suggestion of		
3		infidelity by Prince Philip- Is it		
4		because she was sure of his love in a		

5		way that Diana was <u>not</u> sure of	
6		Charles' love?	
7	Biog	It's a completely different situation	
8		isn't it? I mean it doesn't seem	
9			to me    Sandra <u>No</u> , I don't think that's the case at
10		that Prince Philip has ever been in	a:ll (.) I: think the Queen's known
11		<u>love</u> with anybody else except the	all along that he's been a bit of a
12		Queen and that he's (.) certainly	fly-by-night but you just <u>put</u> up and
13		nowadays given her his total loyalty	<u>shut</u> up in them days, you <u>don't</u>
14		his total support	no::w

In the example above Judy Finnegan is asking a question which implies that the Queen ignored suggestions of Prince Philip's infidelity because she was secure in his love for her, providing a conventional interpretation of events in terms of romantic love. Although the question is addressed to the biographer, Sandra, ignoring her response as an 'expert', provides her own reply at (line 9) which rejects both Judy's romantic interpretation and the biographer's acquiescence. Rather, she provides an answer based upon changes in women's increased ability to speak out against male behaviour in the patriarchal family setting. The biographer's answer and Sandra's stand out in contrast to one another. What we are beginning to see here is that the opening up of a mediated conversational floor that allows the challenging of the wisdoms discussed in the text. This becomes more visible in other viewer exchanges.

#### *b. Jointly constructing a turn*

As we have seen, Coates (1994) argues that Sacks et al's turn taking model does not fit all female conversation because in a 'collaborative floor' turns are jointly owned. Therefore,

simultaneous speech is common and not interpreted as interruption. This was visible in this study in the women's conversation in the focus group discussion. However, they also use the strategy of joining turns in the studio whilst watching television, not only by answering questions at the same time as studio participants but also by jointly constructing and completing turns.

Extract 18

[Alice/ *Kilroy* 14/5/96 discussion programme on care for the elderly]

		Studio		Home
1	Woman	What I'd like to say very briefly is if		
2		the reward for a ca::ring daughter		
3		who sacrifices marriage and career		
4		is to find herself on the streets		
5		that's	Alice	Homeless
6		no encouragement for anybody...		

Extract 19

[Emma/ *This Morning* 7/7/98 'sex problems' phone-in with Dr. Ruth Westheimer]

		Studio		Home
1	Dr Ruth	...you already are <u>say:ing</u> we have a		
2		problem here (.) <u>chil</u> dren, jo::b, a::l		
3		of the pressures of li::fe you <u>must</u>		
4		make a <u>pr</u> iority by saying <u>once</u> a		
5		week <u>we</u>		
6		need some time together...	Emma	Wednesday morning ten thirty, heh,
7				heh, heh [sarcastically]



Extract 20

[Angela/*This Morning* 18/1/96 segment discussion with expert doctor on fertility]

	Studio	
1	Judy	still, the same statistics of er one in
2		ten are still infertile?
3	Doctor	well, as the
4		er (.) information is
5		accumulating we believe that it is
6		actually closer to one in six
7		and er
8		there's been a lot recently on
9		er pro-
10		-blems with men's sperm
11		counts
12		falling and also some of the social
13		changes...
	Angela	That's a <u>lo:t</u> in it
		.hh God!
		I'm lucky then
		men's men's, it <u>is</u> they're getting
		less.

The examples above all show moments of joining in with the utterance in the studio and completing turns. I include an extension of extract 20 because so far most of the examples I have included have suggested that the women only produce occasional isolated outbursts. Whilst this is often true, extract 20 also displays an example more akin to conventional conversation with the viewer taking up a more sustained role in the interaction, until by line 11 Angela jointly completes the turn occurring in the studio 'it is they're getting less'.

In these examples the viewer at home takes the opportunity of completing a turn in relation to the discourse occurring in the studio. Significantly, their conversational turns clearly respond to the sequencing of the interaction within the programme. They also demonstrate an extension of the unitary speaker/hearer exchange, that is usually at the core of

conversation analysis. The nature of broadcast communication's 'double articulation' means that it is possible for there to be more than one primary addressee. As the speakers do not share the same physical location, the broadcast medium allows them to take turns simultaneously without either speaker losing a place in the interaction. In non-mediated conversation analysis the 'turn-taking' regime would insist that in instances of simultaneous talk one speaker would be forced to relinquish the floor. In contrast, what I have found in these responses is the construction of a 'mediated conversational floor' of collaborative simultaneous talk in the viewing practices of women watching morning television.

### **8.2.2 Secondary responses - interrogating the broadcast text**

Thus far, I have been able to show that we can analyse the 'para-social' broadcast encounter by borrowing tools from CA and other sociolinguistic investigations from research into women's speech groups. I have demonstrated that the women in the study, even in the smallest of utterances, are indeed engaging with the text in a way that defines the moment of viewing in terms of a 'mediated conversational floor'. As a media study however, this also allows us some insight into what this means in terms of the viewers' making sense of the media text itself. Looking closely at conversational actions gives us valuable insights into the very moment that the process of interpreting a text, at its reception, begins.

Already when the viewers respond to questions we can see how they are interpreting suggestions in the studio, making sense of them and even challenging them. If we acknowledge the establishment of a shared or 'mutually constructed mediated floor', we can also begin to think about other interjections from the women which do not necessarily fit

the clear conversational sequencing strategies (that I identify as 'primary responses') such as those which begin to emerge in example 20 as the women begin to interrogate the studio discussion. I would suggest from the data that there are two categories of secondary responses where the viewers are clearly evaluating the broadcast discourse:

- i. Formulations
- ii. Argumentative interrogations.

*i. Formulations*

This second level of participation is where the audience member comments on the talk occurring in the studio and produces a 'formulation' of what has been said. Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) suggest that, in the news interview, such 'formulations' of interviewee's assertions are made by the interviewer for the benefit of the overhearing audience.

According to Heritage and Greatbatch, formulations work to:

both advance the prior report by finding a point in the prior utterance and thus shifting its focus, redeveloping its gist, making something explicit that was previously implicit in the prior utterance, or by making inferences about its presuppositions or implications. They propose a direction for subsequent talk by inviting interviewee response to what is formulated. (1991:104)

However, in these examples the viewers clearly make the formulation for themselves:

Extract 21  
[Sandra/*This Morning* 16/1/96, segment on wrinkle treatment]

	Studio	
1	Expert	...but certainly we, the wrinkles and

Home



2		the photo-damage are within our		
3		brief=		
4	Richard	=what on the National Health?		
5	Expert	er, no not usu [ally		
6	Richard	[no, I didn't think so		
7	Judy	[no, heh I mean		
8		sunbathin-		
9				
10	Expert	can I just say one more problem that	Sandra	Exactly, cos you can't get nothing
11		you have to watch out, which is why		for vanity
12		you need a dermatologist is just that		(3)
13		any ( ? ) on the skin can end up		
14		with what we call post inflammatory		Gotta be rich to get rid of wrinkles
15		increase or decrease pigmentation		
16				

We can clearly see here how the viewer at line 10 begins her formulation of what has just been said about the treatment not being available on the NHS. She shifts the focus to vanity not being an acceptable treatment for health care and then again at line 14 redevelops the gist to suggest that you have to be rich to get rid of wrinkles. This example, whilst seemingly about a trivial point in the programme (wrinkle treatment) also points to something ideologically significant. As the viewer interacts with the discussion, she is also producing a commentary. That is, whilst we are encouraged as 'Mrs Daytime Consumer' to consider products and treatment (within the genre of the magazine programme), Sandra's commentary points out that to look young is also expensive and beyond the reach of most women, who rely on the N.H.S.

Extract 22

[Myra/*The Time The Place* 20/15/96 discussion programme on 'female sterilisation']

[gyn = gynaecologist]

		Studio		Home
1	Gyn	...people think you can reverse it		
2		around and years later that is you		
3		meet another partner go and have		
4		your tubes put back together and		
5		have another baby and it's not that		
6		simple. So I would also call that a		
7		complication - it's the pain and the		
8		suffering years later to find out, new		
9		marriage, new partner		
10			no baby	Myra because (.)
11	John S	which leads us to I suppose one of		if they have had it
12		the most controversial aspects of		done then because of
13		this. I mean there is a case for		post-natal depression or
14		actually saying, you can only be		something-
15		sterilised if, for example you're a		just decide, then, say they
16		certain age or you'd had		split up and that's it
17		so many children...		

In example 20 Myra provides a formulation of the gynecologist's warnings of the possibility of relationships splitting up after the woman has decided to have a sterilisation. However, she reformulates the issue of such a complication by adding in some information that the gynecologist did not refer to. In lines 12/13 she suggests that the reason why women might decide to be sterilised could be due to post-natal depression from previous pregnancies. Arguably Myra is inserting valuable information here which has not been discussed at any other point in the programme and which indeed has ideological implications. One might say that the male gynecologist is flippantly masking issues of

women's psychology around motherhood in his argument about the difficulties of reversing sterilisation. However, Myra, in her capacity as lay speaker, though she is not co-present, is still able to engage with the text and provide her own insightful analysis of a 'female-centred' problem.

[Extract 23]  
[Jana/Vanessa 18/7/98 discussion programme on women bouncers]  
[Bev= female bouncer, Maggie = her sister ]

		Studio		Home
1.	Maggie	I had a taxi company for five years		
2		and I run that for five years and Kay		
3		actually worked with me and <u>that</u>		
4		got in my blood but I realised that I		
5		couldn't have a husband <u>and</u>		
6		children and do that job. <u>This</u> isn't		
7		the job for a married woman- wi-		
8		sorry [to her sister who is not		
9		married] for a divorcee		
10			With	Jana
11		children to care about		what you're sayin is that a <u>man's</u>
12	Bev	that's what I am=		life is more- is not as valuable as a
13	Maggie	=I'm ever so sorry		woman's life
14	Bev	I'm a single parent with a child		

In the extract above Jana's formulation inscribes a new twist to the gist of Maggie's argument about the need for a mother to be in a 'safe' job. Maggie is clearly presenting her position in terms of traditional patriarchal family relations (notice her misuse of the word 'married' with regard to her single sister) whereby the wife/mother is constituted as primary child-carer who is most fundamental to her children's lives. Jana's formulation, therefore, is



about the value placed on the life of a woman in a dangerous job. The issue comes back later in the same programme:

**Extract 24**  
**[Jana/Vanessa 18/7/98 discussion programme on women bouncers]**  
**[Bev= female bouncer, Maggie = her sister ]**

		Studio		Home
1	Maggie	You've gotta think of your kids,		
2		you're letting your kids down, you		
3		go home you can go home and you		
4		can't work ever again=		
5	Bev	=But you do		
6		a job to make a better <u>li::</u> fe for your		
7		kids		
8	Maggie	Yeh but there's other ways of	Jana	So, basically we shouldn't have
9		supporting you kids than ( ? ) come		female police women we shouldn't
10		home injured		have female-

Jana thus comes back with her formulation of what Maggie's argument means - that is that this relates to debates about women's employment in other potentially dangerous fields which is essentially an equal opportunity issue. Her reformulation of Maggie's argument displays a critical engagement with the conversation which exhibits active involvement in the talk. Here Jana is also putting the personal discussion in a wider context concerned with social structure, rather than accepting the ideological problem as psychological dilemma - which Peck (1995) argues is a key feature of the talk show's political function (Chapter Three).

Obviously, these examples of viewers formulating the gist of the speech within the studio do not have the same contextual function as those Heritage (1985) discusses in relation to news interviews. In his paper, Heritage suggests that the formulation can take different approaches. It can be 'co-operative', assisting the interviewee in their discourse, or conversely it can be deliberately provocative. Heritage refers to the 'inferentially elaborative probe' as an unco-operative formulation whereby the interviewer might elaborate some of the interviewee's statements, drawing upon inferences made in their speech, in a challenging manner.

A similar kind of elaboration and probing in formulations exists in varying degrees in all the examples used by the viewers above (in extracts 23 and 24, Jana's challenges are particularly unco-operative, perhaps encouraged by not being co-present). However, the significance of this is more difficult to ascertain. In Heritage's news interviews the device is clearly used to interrogate the interviewee's statements for the benefit of the overhearing audience and in the interests of 'good journalism'. For the viewer at home the investment is different. It could be that in the research setting the women's utterances are for my benefit as overhearer and possibly had I not been there, they might not have articulated their formulations. However, in the interests media reception research these are still significant findings. What I have discovered here are particular moments of articulation which provide challenges to the text and sometimes to conventional norms, expert advice, institutional advice and common sense, as the women work with the text. I would not have had access to this if I were not interested in the actual moment of consumption through the construction of a mediated conversational floor. Interviewing the women about the

programme after the event (as in Chapter Six) does not throw up such precise details of moments of interrogation.<sup>3</sup> I would suggest that what is illuminating is that the fact that these women are making such formulations for themselves, in the process of making sense of the text.

## *ii. Argumentative interrogations*

As indicated above, the women are most vocal when they disagree with discussion occurring in the studio. Most of the interjections discussed previously in this chapter suggest that the women's responses occur at appropriate moments in interactive turn-taking situations - agreeing, answering questions, finishing sentences etc. But at times when the women's feelings were most engaged with an argument in the studio, such invitations were not necessary. Many of the interjections also occur at moments which could be interpreted as 'aggressive' interruptions and certainly do not conform to the assumption that 'feminine' speech is always co-operative or affiliative. Arguably the women do not have to attend to the 'face-needs' of speakers in the studio and their argument can afford to be more aggressive.

However, argumentative interruption is itself a feature of the genre of daytime talk, particularly in the audience participation shows. Simultaneous speech is common in these programmes and simultaneous talk is not always co-operatively constructed talk as we saw in the hosts' pursuit of conflict in Chapter Five. This complicates Coates notion of a co-operative 'shared floor'. In this context, whilst simultaneous speech is encouraged in terms

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<sup>3</sup> I resist using the word 'resistance' for reasons that I will address in the conclusion to this thesis.



of the 'performance' of dramatic spectacle, the 'shared floor' is not necessarily 'co-operative' but can also be 'competitive'.

In the next examples the women produce utterances which register direct challenges and interruptions in the text. For example a viewer might directly ask questions about what is being said in the studio, even though there is no actual potential for reciprocal response:

**Extract 25**

[Jenny / *Good Morning* 25/1/96 Interview with mother and daughter after news story about a 13 year old girl getting married to a Turkish waiter while on holiday. The daughter in the studio was apparently approached by the same man on holiday]

		Studio		Home
1	Nick	Now the news this week that		
2		thirteen-year-old schoolgirl Sarah		
3		Cook had married a Turkish waiter		
4		has shocked parents everywhere.		
5		Yesterday Sarah was made a ward		
6		of court by Essex Social Services.		
7		We'll have to wait to see if her		
8		mother's arrival in Turkey will now		
9		mean Sarah's return to the U.K.		
10		without her husband. (.) Well our		
11		next guest is Corinne Haynes. Her		
12		own eleven-year-old daughter	Jenny	They've made her a ward of court,
13		Stacey was approached by the very		Essex (.) Social Services but she's
14		same man with an offer of marriage		in Turkey so how?
15		when they were on holiday in the		
16		country		

Or the viewer might simply vocalise their objection to what is being said in studio:

**Extract 26**

**[Alice/ Kilroy 14/5/96 discussion programme on caring for the elderly]**

		Studio		Home
1	Man	It costs four hundred and twenty		
2		pounds a week of which we pay one		
3		hundred and twenty pounds and we		
4		expect to do that for the rest of his		
5		life (.) however long that may be		
6		and		
7		the problem nowadays is that	Alice	well, you're pretty wealthy to
8.		people are living a lot longer		afford a hundred and twenty
9	Woman	you're lucky		pounds and still be able to live
10	Man	We're not lucky to have that sort of-		
11		its not a question of luck it's a		
12		question of responsibility		

This may be difficult to interpret from the transcript alone, but in the context of the discussion the man is arguing that it is everyone's duty to care for their parents regardless of cost. However, Alice is annoyed because this disregards the fact that most people cannot afford the kind of cost that he describes. Alice's comment at home interrupts the man's turn but then is reinforced by a similar interjection in the studio from another woman, 'you're lucky'.

Cathy similarly challenges the direction of discussion in the next example:

**Extract 27**

**[Cathy/ Kilroy discussion programme on police misconduct]**

		Studio		Home
1	M.P.	You've got to remember that every		

2	police officer now according to the		
3	statistics will suffer from violence		
4	and assault every four years in his		
5	career. The police are being		
6	assaulted <u>all</u> the time-		
7	Kilroy	-sure	
8	M.P.	- now the	
9	way this programme is going it	Cathy	Yeh, but they know that when they
10	seems to be very one-sided that		go for the job.
11	the police seem to be going round		
12	beating up people		

In the example above, when the MP defends police actions thus attempting to shift the frame of the discussion to be more sympathetic to the police, Cathy's aggressive challenge dismisses his utterance. Again, Sandra interjects in the next extract:

**Extract 28**

[Sandra/ *This Morning* direct address section where Judy Finnegan informs the viewer what's coming up after the break.]

		Studio		Home
1	Judy	Well, we're taking a short break for		
2		the news and coming up later this		
3		morning an interview with the		
4		controversial royal biographer		
5		who's reportedly deeply upset the		
6		Queen with her new book called		
7		<i>Simply Elizabeth</i> . It seems that she		
8		and Prince Philip are now in for the		
9		same tabloid treatment as Charles	Sandra	Good serves em right (.)
10		and Diana - the author talks for the		Poor Diana gets all the flack !
11		first time on television.		



Judy's suggestion is one of regret that the Queen and Prince Philip are coming under such scrutiny however Sandra clearly challenges this and turns it completely around in support of Diana. In doing so, she completely rejects the issue as it is formulated by the presenter in the studio and interrupts Judy with a direct rejection of her statement.

In this next extract, we can see more clearly the 'interrogative', or within gendered assumptions, 'competitive', strategies at work in the shared floor:

**Extract 29**  
**[Bette/ *The Time... The Place* with John Stapleton 12/6/96 discussion programme on 'father's rights']**

		Studio		Home
1	woman 1	I think its very hard and I'd like to		
2		get away from the idea that it's a		
3		father's right, it's a child's right to		
4		see their parents=		
5	woman 2		= a child's right to	
6		see their parent-		
7	woman 3		- a child's right to a	
8		<u>good</u> parent		
9	woman 1	yeh, but the child also has the right		
10		to see a bad parent and I would	Bette	<u>If:</u> the fathers are all okA::Y!
11		agree with that		

In the example above woman 1 forms an argument which shifts the topic of discussion from 'fathers' rights' to 'children's rights' to see their parents. Woman 2 joins in her turn in agreement but woman 3 is challenging in her formulation that a child should only see a good parent. Bette joins in here, troubled by Woman 1 and 2's suggestions, she asserts very strongly that it should only be 'if the fathers are all okay', interrupting woman 1 to produce

her own conflicting position. In this 'shared floor' the speakers in the studio are sharing *conflicting* turns and Bette's interjection, were it co-present, would sit comfortably in the discussion in that she produces a simultaneous turn which disagrees with woman 1 and 2 but collaboratively reinforces woman 3's turn.

**Extract 30**

[Angela/ *This Morning* 18/1/96 phone-in segment on fertility]

		Studio		Home
1	Caller	Hello		
2	Richard	Hello, now how long have		
3		you been	Angela	You've told us now
4		trying to get pregnant?		
5	Caller	erm, about eighteen months now		
6		erm		
7	Richard	Right go on	Angela	(        ?        )
8	Caller	I don't have regular periods, so I		
9		erm obviously don't know when		
10		I'm about to ovulate-		
11	Richard	-arrh		
12	Caller	- erm I		
13		see my doctor but he says to give it		
14		two years before he's willing to go		
15		any fur- [any further		t.hh. it should be a year hh.
16	Richard	[so-		
17	Judy	[so, so another six months		
18		basically		
19	Richard	So, you and your partner have had		
20		not specific tests at all then, I mean		
21		he hasn't had his sperm count		
22		checked or anything like that		
23	Caller	No		
24	Richard	So, you're just trying=		Blame him !

25	Caller	=I mean my	heh, heh, heh
26		partner does smoke and I don't	
27		know if that has anything to do with	
28		it but the main problem is that	
29		I am=	
30	Richard	=irregular=	
31	Caller	=I have irregular	
32		periods	

In the example above Angela comments on the talk with the second person pronoun - 'you've told us now' but continues her involvement in this conversation with an inaudible utterance at line 7, followed clearly by a direct challenge to a doctor's advice as presented by the caller (line15). She then continues with the direction 'blame him!' (line 24). What this indicates is that the viewer is able to make direct challenges to pieces of information. Although she is not questioning the woman caller she *is* questioning the advice given to her by her doctor. Angela's personal knowledge in the exchange overrides the account given by the caller and signals her direct participation in the discussion.

What is beginning to emerge is that participating in the discussion and offering argumentative interrogations is often substantiated by the evocation of subjective points of view, echoing the genre's relational emphasis, as we can see clearly in the next extract:

**Extract 31**  
**[Alice/*The Time... The Place* 14/5/96 discussion programme on care for the elderly]**

		Studio	Home
1	Kilroy	Is Alf right then? Should the	
2		children be inheriting? Do children	



3.		have the right to inherit?		
4	Woman	yes, yes they do. My mother and		
5		father worked all their lives, they	Alice	Well, perhaps they ought to put an
6		paid their dues why shouldn't they		amount, state an amount, if your
7		have the house? I'm struggling to		home's - see somebody said
8		look after my mum.		although your home's taken into
9	Kilroy	I, I'm a le-, I, I work in Victoria		account, a lot of people invest
10		Station cleaning out the lavatories		their money in valuables. Now I
11		and I have to work hard all week		wouldn't have thought of that you
12		and I earn just enough to keep my		know so that's the way of getting
13		family...		around it.

Alice is clearly working out her own argument in relation to the discussion occurring in the studio. In response to the question about whether children should inherit their parents homes, rather than use the money to pay for their care, Alice begins to form an argument about it depending on the value of the home in question (line 5), that they should 'state an amount'. However, she then begins to rethink this argument as she remembers something that was said earlier in the discussion - that 'some people invest money in valuables' as a means of by-passing a property means-test which is something that had not occurred to her. What this demonstrates is that in thinking about a question, an involved viewer begins to work around different ideas suggested in the studio and relate them to their own subjective thoughts and points of view - 'I would never have thought of that'.

In this next example, Eve clearly forms her own evaluation of the man in the studio's narrative by suggesting that he is not jealous but 'mental'. Her remark, 'he wouldn't hit me three times' (line 5) begins to show that often the women make evaluations of the narratives they hear through drawing upon subjective feelings.

**Extract 32**

**[Eve/ Vanessa 16/1/96 discussion programme about jealousy -  
man tells story about dragging his girlfriend out of the pub by her hair]**

		Studio		Home
1	Vanessa	Has she ever ended up in hospital?	Eve	he ain't jealous he's just mental
2	Man	Yes, I've been arrested on three		
3		different occasions for violence		
4		against her through jealousy		
5		erm the		He wouldn't hit me three times
6		last was three months ago		one'd be the last
7		where I		
8		had tried to strangle her		

What is also interesting in Eve's response is her use of the third person to refer to the man involved in the interaction. Here there appears to be a shift in the identity of the primary addressee. The use of 'he' and not the second person pronoun 'you' suggests that this response is now directed to me. At the moments where subjective experiences become more apparent in the woman's responses, my place in the participatory framework becomes more significant.

**8.2.3 Tertiary responses - invoking personal experience**

In the last two examples we could see the viewer in a small way beginning to interrogate the argument in the studio in terms of her self - 'I would never have thought of that', 'he wouldn't hit me three times'. In many examples in my data, all the women gave contributions to the discourse in terms of personal experience, often in a form which echoes the genre's focus on personal experience in individual stories.

In these next examples the women produce evaluations of the discussion in terms of their own lived experience:

Extract 33

[Alice/ Kilroy 14/5/96 caring for the elderly]

		Studio		Home
1	Kilroy	...Let us say it was me and I've got		
2		this expensive house and I now		
3		need nursing care - not National		
4		Health Service treatment but		
5		nursing care. I have to sell my		
6		house in order to get that care. I		
7		have to sell my house in order to		
8		pay for it .hh Are you saying that I		
9		shouldn't have to sell my expensive		
10		house, that I should be able to give		
11		it to my children and your low paid		
12		constituents who are in work now		
13		paying taxes should pay to keep me		
14		in care while I give my expensive		
15		house to my children? [Is that fair?	Alice	That's the other side of the
16	Expert	[Hang on		argument, of course.
17		[audience noise]		
18	Woman	He is not saying that at all		When you put it like that yes, yes,
	Expert	Can I just-		
19	Audience	heh, heh, heh, heh		
20	Woman	No, he is NOT		
21	Kilroy	I'm asking HIM		
22	Woman	Go on then		
23	Kilroy	Go on then she said, go on then Alf	Alice	But, you see a modest home
24	Expert	Right, now I'm saying a number of		wouldn't last very long would it?
25		things. I'm saying that it was not		I'm on about our sort of [gestures
26		their expectation that they would		around the room]



27	have to dispossess er mainly	
28	daughters, caring relatives, many	
29	who have given up the prospect of	
30	marriage, of a career to look after	
31	an elderly mother or father or both	I'm more concerned that there's
32	and whose reward for that is now to	always a home here to come to if
33	be told that they've lost the home	things go wrong that was my
34	they expected to inherit.	concern.

Again here Alice is contemplating the discussion as it occurs in terms of her own situation. She begins to see Kilroy's point about the ethics of the ordinary taxpayer paying for care whilst the children of elderly parents inherit their property. She formulates it as 'the other side of the argument' and to some extent agrees with Kilroy, directly addressing him, 'when you put it like that' using the second person pronoun as the primary addressee. As the discussion continues however, she thinks about her own situation and the possibility of selling her own home - 'but you see a modest home wouldn't last very long' (line 23/24) as she gestures to her surroundings. The 'you see' here is clearly addressed to me, as I become the primary recipient of her discourse as she embarks upon a description of her own personal circumstances.

After considering this she finally articulates her own immediate concern as a mother of four children, which begins at line 31, where she is more concerned 'that there's always a home to come to'. After thinking about Kilroy's suggestion that the parental home should provide the capital for care for the elderly, Alice draws upon her own experience as a mother of four children who all presently live at home. She is therefore rejecting Kilroy's

suggestion by working through her personal position in terms of her *lived* experience of motherhood.

Drawing upon narrative experience, therefore, is one of the main ways in which the women in the study interactively make sense of the morning programme discussion. In the next extract, Cathy is watching a discussion on Kilroy about police misconduct but is able to formulate an opinion through vocalising something of her relationship with her son:

**Extract 34**  
**[Cathy/ Kilroy 15/5/96 'police misconduct'**  
**MP= John Townsend, Conservative MP for Bridlington]**

	Studio		Home
1	M.P.	I think it's society's problem as well	
2		particularly as far as young people	
3		are concerned. Society in particular	
4		the (chattering) classes have set	
5		their minds against physical	
6		punishment and I've got a lot of	
7		sympathy for the police erm I	
8		actually do believe we are suffering	
9		from the demise of the old	
10		fashioned good hiding . We've done	
11		away with the cane in schools	
12		so what do we do with young	Cathy I think there's too many do-gooders
13		bullies like ↑these- you exclude	around
14		them from the school and they end	(3)
15		up on the street causing trouble and	
16		until we bring back some form of	the do-gooders where the- the
17		corporal punishment and we get	things should be sorted our like
18		parents to take on more	you've got people jumpin' in and
19		responsibility we won't get	saying ooh you shouldn't be

20	anywhere. In the old days when I	allowed to do this like smacking
21	was a young boy the policeman	children people are telling you
22	could clip em around the ear and	you can't smack your children now
23	now, as the gentleman just said,	well they're your children you
24	now he would lose his job. We've	discipline them. I mean you have
25	got to give the police more powers,	gotta battle other people (.)
26	so we don't want real violence but	I mean if I come to discipline
27	clip them over the ear would be	[Andrew] now he tells me 'I'll
28	quite, quite (the thing)	phone Childline' heh, heh, I mean
29	the old days you'd get a cuff across	that's how bad it's got
30	the ear as you said, which is quite	
31	right. Nowadays	
32	you get a belting, fractured cheek	
33	bones and you get locked up falsely	
34	charged as well on top	

In the extract above the MP is clearly articulating a very conservative line about discipline and police power which Cathy, ignores to re-articulate his argument in terms of her own experience as a mother. It seems that she is talking about a wider perceived liberal emphasis against physical discipline that exists within contemporary culture. Moreover she refers to people who hold such beliefs in her own phrase as 'do-gooders' and then goes on to tell an anecdote about her own son's ability to use his knowledge of well publicised help lines for children whenever she comes to discipline him. She then evaluates this in terms of the studio debate, 'I mean that's how bad it's got' (lines 28/29).

This extract is interesting because, despite the programme topic essentially focusing on police powers, Cathy finds some common ground which is about her experience of disciplining her own son as a single mother. She re-articulates the discussion in terms of her own subjectivity and personal experience as a mother, even though she does not exactly



address the issue as presented by the person in authority, the MP and she vicariously participates in the studio discussion.

Emerging in these discourses is the recourse to subjective experience. Some of the disagreements that the women put forward to the studio discussion are therefore based upon their own lives. Whilst the women do not adhere to the cultural concept of feminine 'co-operation', their use of the mediated floor encourages responses in terms of relational, connected experience. This draws upon their experience here as 'mothers' or 'wives' and the women construct gendered identities through their responses to the televised text. Ochs observes that, "few features of language directly and exclusively index gender" (1992:340). What we need to make clear here is the importance of context. These are expressions which are influenced both by the gendering of a relational discourse as well as by the televisual drama of conflict. Whilst the text calls upon their 'feminine' relational experience, it also displays the 'drama' of conflict. Ochs's concept of 'indexicality' refers to "a property of speech through which cultural contexts such as social identities (e.g. gender) and social activities (e.g. a gossip session) are constituted by particular stances and acts" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992:335). Therefore, we can see here that the conversational 'performance' of gender is also 'indexed' by the social activity of television viewing.

### **8.3 Telling stories**

Coates suggests that, "story-telling plays a central role in friendly conversation between women" (1996:94). The form of personal narrative is also one of the key features of talk show discourse (and I would argue magazine programme discourse). It is hardly surprising

then that the women in my study often produce their own narratives as they interact with the programme.

The use of narrative involves an extended turn whereby the routines of conversational turn-taking are suspended. Graham argues that in the sociological interview encounter "stories, in providing a self structured format for the interview can counteract the exploitative tendencies of social research [...] In a situation of inequality, both honest stories and fabricated tales are resources by which informants can redress the balance of power" (1984:119/120). An extended turn based around a subjective experience thus allows the participant control over the direction of the discourse. In the social research interview this control is gained over the power of the interviewer.

What is more interesting here, however, is how in the moment of viewing in their location, the use of narrative can provide a stage for the viewer which relegates the discourse produced in the studio to the background. In such a 'mutually constructed' text, there are moments where the viewers' contributions take precedence, through the staging of personal narrative events. This blurs the conceptualisation of text/reader relations in traditional media theory. Their power to interact allows the viewer the space to produce their own 'text' such that the power of the televised text becomes only part of the reception process. The viewer therefore is not simply 'receiver' but at crucial moments is also 'producer' in various viewing moments.

In non-mediated conversation, although a narrative account suggests an extended monologic turn, it does not mean that the narrative stands outside the conversational exchange. Sacks, suggests that narratives are "carefully and appropriately situated" by their tellers in sequences of talk (1978:261). According to Sacks, most stories get told with a three part sequence: a story preface which announces the availability of a story, a response whereby other participants align themselves as hearers of the story and ultimately the third turn is the production of the story. For example:

Barbara: My aunt died

Martha: Died, what happened

Barbara: ((tells story)) (Goodwin, M. 1990)<sup>4</sup>

Labov's (1972)<sup>5</sup> claims that the subsequent narrative can be organised into six elements:

*Abstract*: summarises the central action and main point of the narrative. A story-teller uses this to preface the story.

*Orientation*: sets the scene.

*Complicating action*: central part of the story proper

*Evaluation*: addresses the point of the narrative. These often appear in 'free clauses' as such they are not actually part of the narrative.

*Resolution*: final conclusion to sequence of events

*Coda*: wraps up the action.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Thornborrow, 1997.



These would usually occur in order, apart from evaluations which can occur dispersed through other elements.

Here is an example of a short narrative a viewer inserts into her interaction with the programme:

Extract 35

[Angela/ *This Morning* 18/1/96 segment on fertility]

		Studio		Home
1	Gyn	...there are some tests that you can		
2		get over the counter through the	Angela	mhm
3		chemists to er identify the		
4		fertile		Take your temperature it goes up!
5		time of the cycle but the biggest		
6		Difficulty really with this situation		
7		is obviously you're potentially only		
8		fertile once in every four months so		
9		chances are obviously reduced		That's how I got caught with mine
10	Judy	Mhm		(.)
11	Gyn	Certainly in these kind of situations		I took my temperature - when it
12		we could try and step into the		rises you have it (.)
13		investigation half way and see if we		Got Carrie the first time and
14		can actually give you something to		Alice the second time so it
15		get the ovulation more regular. And		worked. (1) It's a bit
16		I think you should probably press		spontaneous - it's like COME
17		your G.P.		HOME

<sup>5</sup> Originally in Labov (1972) Language and the Inner City: Studies in Black English Vernacular, University of Pennsylvania press and Oxford: Blackwell reprinted in Jaworski, A. and Coupland, N (1999) The Discourse

In this example Angela displays active listenership (line 2) and she offers her own advice for how to identify 'the fertile time of the cycle' with the direction (line 4). Angela, in keeping with experiential validation we have seen before, supports the accuracy of her statement by stating that that's how she got pregnant (line 9). One could see the utterance, 'so that's how I got caught with mine' as a story preface which invites a second turn response of 'how did you get caught with yours?' (I might be expected to provide this turn). This turn is not taken and Angela pauses before she begins her own narrative at line 11. Therefore, before embarking upon her narrative account Angela engages in the conversational norms that usually apply in face-to-face conversation.

In terms of Labov's structure, the opening line 'that's how I caught with mine' could be seen as the *abstract* which summarises the main point of the narrative and invites questions.

There appears to be no *orientation* but there are the narrative clauses which appear temporally sequenced - the *complicating action* 'I took my temperature' (line 11) and the *resolutions* 'Got Carrie the first time and Alice the second time' (lines 13/14). Then follows her *evaluation* 'so it worked' (line 14) and the *coda* could be, 'it's a bit spontaneous it's like COME HOME' (lines 15/16) which returns the discourse to the present tense.

However, analysing the narrative in terms of Labov's structure does not necessarily tell us anything about the specificity of narratives produced in this particular setting. Whilst Montgomery (1991) and others have argued that broadcast talk creates new kinds of discursive forms and genres specific to the context in which they are produced, it is also

possible to argue here that new discursive forms are also produced in daily interaction across the medium of broadcasting in the everyday lives of viewers at home.

Thornborrow' s (1997) essay on narrative functions in talk shows, suggests that, "stories are a key resource within the talk show discourse in so far as they are used by speakers to accomplish a variety of actions - not just to tell of their own experiences, but to construct their position within the situated context of the talk as they engage in the dynamic interactive business of 'having their say'" (1997:259). I would suggest that this data shows that 'having their say' is also a vital part of the viewing experience of these women through which they orient their position to the broadcast discourse.

Extract 36

[Jana/ Vanessa 8/7/98 discussion on female bouncers

Kay = female bouncer with children, Maggie = her concerned sister, Bev = another female bouncer]

		Studio		Home
1	Kay	I've done it for four years I must be		
2		good to be able to - t'have stayed in		
3		the job con [tinuously		
4	Bev	[I'm not		
5		questioning	Jana	We had er a run in in Stones
6		whether you're good or bad at the		a couple of weeks ago where the
7		job what I am questioning is your		manager <u>hit</u> one of my friends-
8	Kay	mhm		ma:le there's absolutely no reason
9		logic in that it is the <u>o:nly</u> way you		Like <u>really</u> swung at 'im right
10		can provide for your kids		across my face (.) it came right
11	Vanessa	Kay, it's quite interesting, interesting		across my face and Adam- it
12		because Steve and Maggie have		knocked Adam out- I got inside
13		formed a sort of alliance the most		after all the (.) his brother's a
14		unlikely pair but they're both saying		marine and all his marine friends



15		virtually the same thing to you,	were down outside going mad at
16		they're both looking at you- they're	the doorman and everything
17		both looking at you [they're both	whereas if these doorman had been
18	Bev	[the only	female the females would have
19		difference is warning you and	been able to calm them down
20		(.) and that Maggie's saying that	and say the manager was wrong we
21		doormen are thick	know that and been able to talk
22	Maggie	No	to them there'd have been half as
23	Vanessa	Well they're both- she didn't say they	much trouble
24		are thick	
25	Bev	You <u>did</u> say that you <u>did</u> say that	

In the example above Jana takes an extended turn to tell her narrative. She begins with her 'story preface' at line 5 - 'we had a run in in Stones' - and some orientation ('a couple of weeks ago', 'where the manager hit one of my friends', lines 6/7). There is an evaluation in line 8 - 'there's absolutely no reason' - and then she continues with narrative clauses which are chronological. At line 17, however, Jana reveals the evaluative point of the story which positions the narrative in terms of the studio debate about female bouncers. Jana's narrative helps her to skillfully construct her position by suggesting that had the bouncers been female, they would have talked to the marines and 'there'd have been half as much trouble' (line 22/23). In so doing the viewer is making a critical comment on the nature of an all-male confrontation which she suggests female bouncers would have been better equipped to diffuse, through 'talk'.

In Thornborrow's study she argues that within talk shows such evaluations "function as contentious statements which may then be taken up and responded to by other participants"

(1997:257). In the case of the viewer at home their evaluation cannot be used to sustain the dynamic of talk or to affect its direction as the participants are not co-present. Arguably then, the viewer is positioning herself to display her alignment to the discourse to me, the other 'silent' viewer. In this scenario whereby the possibility of affecting the dynamic of the discourse is not open to the viewer, I would suggest that the narrative and the consistent production of the evaluation has another crucial function. At home the woman is positioned as the 'viewer' and a 'participator' in the audience, and as such must make sense of the text that flows into *her* home. Personal subjectivities are embedded within the experience of the public mediated text meeting the private domestic space of the home. In this collision, encouraged by the genre's emphasis on personal experience, the women are encouraged to 'have their say' too, but their contributions are often more complicated, they are also about the active relational construction of 'what does this mean for me?'.

**Extract 37**

[Jenny /*Good Morning* 25/1/96 segment on children who got their parents to give up smoking ]  
[after a video segment on a child who was bullied at school for smelling of cigarettes because her mother smoked]

		Studio		Home
1	Mother	When Catherine came home that		
2		day and actually said I was so upset		
3		like I said in the video that erm that		
4		I decided to stop and that erm the		
5		only way to erm stop is just to		
6		I didn't throw my cigarettes away		
7		but I put them in a draw	Jenny	The thing is though
8		and then		she's been smoking
9		about six months later I threw them		all the time that child's been
10		away.		growing up right

11	Nick	And have you fully		from a baby
12		stopped now=		I er I was workin in
13	Mother	=two years now		the pub the other
14	Nick	and have you definitely, definitely		day and er a
15		stopped		couple came
16	Mother	two years		in they had two young
17	Nick	Because you went ten years=		girls, I'm talking like maybe about
18	Mother	=I went		er oh two and the
19		ten years when I was having my		other one was about
20		children and then I started smoking		three and they
21		again n' thinking-		were having a meal
22	Nick	- when the		both of them were smokin'
23		pressure was on in your life and		buy (.) like (.)
24		things were a bit difficult		like they'd do it one at a time
25	Mother	and I thought it would		and one'd go out and
26		make me lose weight and in fact I		stand in the corner
27		put two stones <u>on</u> smok[ing		but its still gonna travel
28	Nick	[God		I mean it was like
29	Mother	and (.) when I stopped smoking I		from the fire [points] to
30		lost two stone as well. So people		there [points] and I
31		who think they'll lose weight by		felt like sayin'
32		smoking they don't		but it travels
33	Nick	So what has been the strongest		(2)
34		factor in you being able to give up		I mean I come
35		Is it willpower?		home from work
36	Mother	willpower and Catherine sayin'		and I mean everyday
37		that and also now I realise that it		I have to wash my
38		does smell awful but you don't		hair and change
39		realise it when you are a smoker		my clothes
40		it's only when you stop	Helen	yeh
41	Nick	Do you smell better now Catherine?		
42		Does she smell better? Are you		(.)
43		really happy about that?	Jenny	Because of the
44		[Catherine nods]		smell on me
45		We- were you really upset with		and I'm behind the bar
46		what happened at school that day?		



This, like many of the personal narratives that the women produce has quite a complicated structure. The narrative is placed within the context of the programme segment which is about parents who smoke, and talks of a girl who was bullied because she smelled of cigarettes. Jenny's opening statement (line 7) does not look like the usual 'story preface' which anticipates a story. Without a host to elicit the story Jenny seems to be linking her narrative to the events detailed in the studio herself. However, she then embarks on a series of narrative clauses which relate to the events she witnessed whilst working in the pub - she makes the evaluation 'but its still gonna travel' (line 27) declaring how pointless it is to simply smoke away from the children in the same room which is directly related to the studio based discussion. However, this leads to another small narrative about herself, 'I come home from work...' (line 34), the evaluation of which leads to what Labov calls a coda - the clause that wraps up the action like 'and that was that' - in Jenny's narrative it is 'and I'm behind the bar' (line 45).

What is evident in this extract is the fact that the story provides a space to evaluate 'what this means for me'. For Jenny, telling the story about the couple with two children smoking in the pub, leads her to consider her own job. Rather than the evaluations leading to the viewers positioning themselves to invite a next speaker, I would suggest that their evaluations position them to take up the personal significance of the issue. However, as the women 'stage' their own experience another phenomena in the 'mediated conversational floor' emerges from the context of the viewing environment. It is apparent from the constructions of the narrative that at this point they are told for my benefit.

Jenny uses the third person pronoun 'he' (line 7) and my place as listener is marked by my own 'active listenership', 'yeh' (line 40). This is visible in some of the other narratives and extended turns that the women produce. This does not necessarily invalidate what has gone before, but represents a more complicated phenomenon produced in relation to my presence, which cannot be categorised as 'direct' para-social interaction with the text. Here, then the TV text becomes a pre-text, a reference point whereby the women elucidate subjective accounts occasioned by the textuality of the programme. The text here is stimulating memories which may have been recalled, if not vocalised, had I not been present. The benefit of this kind of research, is that it takes me to locations in the text that are meaningful to the women's personal identities but could not be accessed through the interview or focus group, giving more specific insights into the way textuality and subjectivity are mobilised together.

The next extract is taken from one of many instances from Alice's viewing experience whereby she draws upon personal narrative throughout watching the programmes. This programme particularly resonated with her own experience.<sup>6</sup>

**Extract 38**

**[Alice/ Kilroy 14/5/96 discussion programme of care for the elderly]**

		Studio	Home
1	Valerie	...what is happening is very sick	
2		People are being discharged from	
3		Hospital forcibly when they have no	
4		Statutory rights to do that into	

<sup>6</sup> This could not be planned in the research as the topics for discussion in these programmes are not publicised in TV schedules. The resonance with these women's lives is due to the gendering of the genre.

5		Residential homes. Social services	Alice	that's what happened
6		Have no statutory rights, no lawful		to my dad
7		Rights to do that		they wanted to send
8	Kilroy	But that's Valerie that may or may		'im home from hospital
9		not be happening but I thought the		and we refused to
10		Argument, I thought-		take him home
11	Valerie	but it is happening		it was awful but
12		[audience noise]		I mean I sort
13	Kilroy	I know, I know but we also know		of live twenty
14		Valerie as a fact that there are a lot		miles away from mom
15		of elderly people in hospital		I've got a car
16		blocking up beds who don't need		to keep popping
17		medical care		over, he couldn't
18	Valerie	There are NOT!		get up and down
19	Kilroy	Well there <u>are</u> [Valerie		the stairs, he kept
20	Valerie	[In my case-		leaving the taps
21	Kilroy	= But		on, the cooker
22		that's not what we're arguing about		on, he's burnt
23		is it now?		all the carpets
24	Valerie	(            ?            )		you know well
25	Kilroy	What we're arguing about is		mom just couldn't
26		whether or not those who have		cope so-
27		the means should be expected to		but the doctor was
28		pay for their own care		clearly under pressure
29	Expert	Their answer as you've heard		in hospital to vacate
30		[audience noise] - not for health-		the bed as soon as he
31		we're talking about care		got a little better
32	Expert	Their answer as you've heard is		physically, you know
33		that they have been paying. We're		they wanted him out
34		not talking about people with the		No, but we thought if
35		most expensive homes. Many of		he goes home we could see
36		them are looking after themselves		mom dying first when really
37		now, without resorting to nursing		she's well to a certain degree
38		homes. My starting point is that		but she's frail, she's eighty-three
39		both sides of parliament have now		and she's gone quite frail
40		accepted that the present		she couldn't pick him up when



41	arrangements are wrong .hhh my	he fell. He wouldn't let
42	concern is that there are victims	a neighbour come round
43	of the present arrangement over	and pick him up it
44	forty thousand of [them elderly	had to be a member of the
45	Valerie [YES	family .hhhh
46	Expert people all .hh had their homes sold	my sister-in-law happens
47	above their heads	to live close before
48	Valerie last year and again	now has had to get the
49	tens of thousands=	kids out of bed because my brother
50	Kilroy =so what should	wasn't there, put them
51	have happened? What should, so	in the car to drive down
52	hang on Alf, what should have	'cos mom just couldn't pick
53	have happened?	him up and he went mad when
54	These people who-	mum tried to get the
55	let's say it was me and I've got this	neighbours in. So it was going
56	expensive house and I now need	from bad to worse so I really
57	nursing care – not National Health	sympathise with some of these
58	Service treatment but nursing	people
59	care...	

Alice opens with the story preface 'that's what happened to my dad' (line 5) which allows her to begin her narrative. The subsequent discourse is a complex mixture of narrative clauses and evaluations with the repetition of 'you know', signaling the address to me. It also represents an intricate weaving of both personal narrative experience and validation of the point of the story in relation to the televised discourse. Between lines 7-10 she produces an abstract of the story, 'they wanted to send him home from hospital ...', which clearly relates to the studio issue. She then provides background information about the conditions of her father living at home (lines 12 -26). She reasserts the relationship of her personal story to studio the topic ' but the doctor was clearly under pressure...' (line 27) and then returns to her explanation of her parent's situation. There is another narrative embedded

here about her sister-in-law getting called out to her parents during the night, beginning at line 46. Finally, she produces an evaluation of the situation, 'it was going from bad to worse' (line 55/56) and then ultimately her personal coda, 'so I really sympathise with some of these people' (line 57/58).

What is occurring here is the complex business of relating one's own subjective experience to the discourse produced in the studio. Whilst the framework allows participation it obviously does not allow reciprocation, but it does offer the space for personal alignment. The process of discursively constructing a subject position through the mediated text is vital to the viewing experience.

I would argue then that what we can see appearing in the data is not just a conversational pattern whereby viewers can be seen to be taking part in a conversational exchange. In keeping with a genre that invites the telling of personal experience there is a level of viewer participation whereby the women are able to contribute their own narratives and personal evaluations too. These references to personal experience are moments of working through ideological positions thrown up by the text. The key feature here is that as well as a CA approach which looks for patterns which govern the rules by which conversation sequences take place regardless of speaker, when observing these women's interaction with the text we can also see how their participation depends on the construction of their own subjective positions and thus their gendered identities through their roles *as women*.

## Conclusion

I am not implying that these exchanges are the same as face-to-face interaction since it is obvious that the studio cannot respond to the viewer at home (although 'phone-ins' are devices which assist reciprocity). But through these para-social encounters, I have identified a conversation floor which is specific to the conditions of broadcasting which I call the 'mediated conversational floor'. Through broadcast communication, in morning television at least, viewers' experience of the discussion can be influenced by their own speech production as well as that produced in the studio which produces a 'mutually constructed text' of the kind that Coates argues is a product of a shared floor. I would argue that this is a significant dimension of television reception and mediated communication here precipitates new ways of constructing of identities. What I have found is that within these talk based genres, whose ideological position is constantly shifting and unstable, there is a discursive potential for the viewer to have a powerful part in constructing the text for themselves. This takes place through involvement in conversational utterances and in the sustained working through of discursive positions through narrating their own lived experiences. It is resonant of Fiske's (1992) claim that textuality and subjectivity are inextricably intertwined and this mutually constructed text gives us a unique insight into text/reader relations.

Another dimension to the piloting of this kind of research is that I argued that the morning talk genre inscribes a particular *feminine* subjectivity through its calls to relational experience. What we have seen here is that gendered articulations are not tied directly to folklinguistic assumptions such as 'women are more co-operative', but are located within



the interactive appeal of the specific context. That is, at moments the women respond to the 'mediated conversational floor', produced by the invitation to participate, co-operatively, and at others they respond to the text's appeals to the drama of conflict in 'having their say'. However, these responses are still gendered, since they are ultimately framed within culturally constructed 'feminine' appeals to relational experience also embedded within the texts. Arguably this is a feminine communicative competence necessary for taking pleasure in these texts in the same way that Brunsdon (1981) argued for the cultural competences required for reading the soap opera. In the previous chapter, the women suggested that it was this relating of personal, private experience that turned their male partners off from the genre. The women therefore produce constructions of their own subjectivity in relation to the dominant discourses of the shows - the validation of their 'ordinary' roles as women. What this suggests therefore is that conventional wisdoms about women's speech cannot simply be mapped onto their discursive responses to the conversational text, but that these utterances are at the same time produced by the context of the event itself - watching mid-morning television.

## Conclusion

This conclusion will briefly retrace the trajectory running through this analysis of a gendered communicative event and draw some conclusions from this thesis.

### *Summary*

In the opening chapter, I argued for feminist concerns with communication to bridge some of the strands of research that have mainly been demarcated as separate forms of inquiry. Here, I have been concerned with the relationship between forms of mass communication and forms of interpersonal communication, with particular regard to the contemporary broadcasting phenomenon of 'talk' programming which targets women in the morning (from 9am-12 noon).

By suggesting that we could understand more about an increasingly conversational style of broadcasting through a focus on the 'talk' itself, I have called for cultural studies to reinstate early interests in the speech of ordinary people as a site which can reveal some of the workings of cultural phenomenon. Recalling Bakhtin's concept of 'speech genres' we can decipher similar rule-governed strategies in broadcasting's communicative relationship with its audiences. Thus this research presented a unique interdisciplinary approach to the study of mediated communication that cast its theoretical net over disciplines such as sociolinguistics and discourse analysis as well as forms of inquiry more traditionally associated with media and cultural studies.

The project has therefore employed theories of discourse analysis in relation to the explosion of talk-related programming on the morning terrestrial schedule. In so doing it has moved beyond the impasse that has dominated academic evaluations of talk shows as representing either a positive (alternative), or a negative (tabloid) public sphere. In contrast, this research was concerned with how this mediated phenomenon embeds itself within the construction of daily life. Therefore, the analysis is not just of talk per se, but of *televised* talk and thus I have drawn upon media studies concerned with the media's *communicative* function in the modern age. This represents an interesting public/private interface which impacts upon the gendering of space through representing new forms of interaction which are lifted out and re-embedded across space and time (Giddens, 1991).

Insisting on researching the media in this way revealed alternative methods of analysis to those offered by the more traditional encoding/decoding paradigm born from a structuralist analysis. By engaging with approaches to discourse that are usually employed to interpret the way in which we ordinarily make meaning in face-to-face interaction, I have offered a phenomenological approach to how communicative relationships across broadcasting's reach are pragmatically and meaningfully developed.

In the analysis of *This Morning*, *Good Morning*, *Kilroy*, *The Time...The Place* and *Vanessa*, I found that these texts employed strategies which suggested reciprocal 'para-social' relationships with their audiences. The most remarkable features of this



address were the deictic references to co-present and co-temporal arrangements, as well as the presenters' performances 'as themselves', where arguably the traditional spectacle/spectator distinction have become eroded. These strategies were nonetheless part of the 'spectacle' of the show, however spontaneous they appear, as they also conformed to television's entertainment bias through the drama of 'what will happen next' or the pursuit of conflict.

Further, I suggested that the participatory, para-social emphasis, was characterised by the appeal to intimate and mutual self-disclosure which also drew upon culturally inscribed codes of a gossip genre. Much of this gendering of a speech genre was achieved through an address which constructed a specific community of women (Mrs Daytime Consumers) through assumptions of 'feminine' cultural knowledges, such as the references to soap operas, personal and private issues related to health, relationships and family life etc.. Therefore, I argued that these texts presented a particularly modern form of gossip which was also para-socially constructed across the space of broadcasting.

In the audience findings it became apparent that the viewing pleasures for the women in the study were founded upon these texts' private and personal discussion, which the women recognised addressed them specifically *as* women. In accordance with the genre's relational (rather than rational) emphasis, the women described using the programmes to draw parallels with their own lives. They also expressed

their approval of the personalities through the ability of 'being able to talk to them', which suggested the acknowledgement of para-social relations.

In finding a method for analysing the women viewers' responses to this kind of programming, I argued that to research the immediacy of the text, we should record what the women say during broadcasting. I suggested a method of transcription that made visible the texts' communicative impact at the time of its broadcast, which opens new ground in the text/audience debate in media research. In these findings, I discovered a 'mediated conversational floor' whereby the women used the programmes as texts to talk to, engaging in conversational exchanges that were more usually associated with face-to-face interaction. The women therefore, assumed the conversational position offered to them by the text but in doing so, they did not necessarily conform to the 'difference' linguistic assumptions for women which construes them as affiliate speakers, because they also responded to the talk shows' display of conflict and 'debate'.

Nonetheless, they constructed gendered positions through contextualising their objections with personal, relational experience and not abstract argument, responding to the talk shows' generic epistemology. My presence in the research environment also complicated the participatory framework and many sustained personal narratives are related directly to me. However, I interpreted this as an engaging direction in the research, as I found moments where the women's subjectivity were bound to the discussion of the text. These represented immediate

encounters where subjectivity and textuality were intertwined as the women constructed senses of themselves through textual forms. The research, therefore, offered original insights into the media's relationship with the discursive construction of identity.

### *Conclusions and directions for future research*

Whilst I have summarised my findings here, it is necessary to offer some further comments on my position in relation to the research since I have refused to either demonise or idealise the women's relationship with morning television. Fairclough (1992, 1995) argues that commercial culture's constant recourse to conversationalised rhetoric is part of an ideological imperative that lures the consumer to compliance. Indeed in this study the women's voices are not heard, except by me. They still remain in the domestic sphere, whilst they are given a *feeling* of participating in debate. This could be interpreted as phantom participation through which the women are ideologically repositioned as the silent masses. However, this does not entirely account for the complexity of the women's practices or give any credence to their discursive competences.

On the other hand Fiske's arguments about the 'producerly text' (1992) (Chapter Six) could be used to encourage reading this relationship as producing a forum for 'semiotic democracy' whereby, through articulating these responses, the women are creatively constructing their own text, thus writing in their own personal meaning so that any ideological textual power is suspended or even overturned. But this



seems rather too celebratory, since the women are also responding to the texts' 'new traditionalism' to conventional gendered appeals to their (limited) roles as primary carers, mothers and wives in a denigrated genre.

I am therefore dissatisfied with either of these accounts which again represent the opposing positions to the talk show and the public sphere. I want to avoid locating my conclusion directly with either of these assertions: bad text/good text, creative audience/duped audience. Instead, I want to argue for a third position which recognises both that these programmes represent a conventional domestic sphere but also that they reproduce it as a mediated space for discussion.

This discursive space is constructed as one that is artfully embedded with the 'everyday', which has been traditionally associated with women's lives. Felski (2000) argues that the 'everyday' has in mainstream theory either been conceived negatively and associated with mundane isolation and thus women's oppression or alternatively, has inspired readings of daily life as synonymous with acts of resistance and subversion. It seems to me that the everyday practices and performances which I describe here cannot be neatly ascribed to either portrait of the quotidian. Felski's argument is that in both cases daily experience has been regarded as outside modern public life and instead she suggests that:

A masculinist cultural tradition, Meaghan Morris suggests, has perceived home as the site of both 'frustrating containment (home as dull) and of truth to be rediscovered (home as real)'. In both cases, it has been seen as existing outside the flux and change of an

authentically modern life. Yet home is not always linked to tradition and opposed to autonomy and self-definition: on the contrary it has been central to many women's definitions of modernity. A feminist theory of everyday life might question the assumption that being modern requires an irrevocable surrendering from home, and might simultaneously explicate the modern dimensions of everyday experiences of the home. (Felski, 2000:26)

In Felski's feminist re-evaluation of the everyday, we must not necessarily assume that temporal repetition, dailiness and familiarity necessitates 'habit only as a straightjacket' because this would be 'to ignore the ways in which routines may strengthen, comfort and provide meaning' (op.cit:28). This resonates with the findings of this study, the daily repetition of a feminised everyday through this programming is not simply to be dismissed for its 'banality' because it is *too* familiar. This would ignore that it does replay the reality of some women's lives and negate the pleasures that these women receive from recognising this familiarity as a space for contextualising their own lived subjectivities. The women by no means produce uniform responses and their engagements are as unique to their experience as they are familiar in their form, "habit is not opposed to individuality but intermeshed with it; our identity is formed out of a distinctive blend of behavioural and emotional patterns" (Felski, 2000:28).

The women's discourses represented in the study constitute articulations of identity occasioned by media texts. In conclusion, I propose considering one more exemplary transcript. Bette is a gay woman watching a discussion programme on fathers' rights to see their children after they leave the family home:

[Bette/ *The Time The Place* discussion programme on 'fathers' rights' 12/6/96]

		Studio		Home
1	John S	...say for example the parent, and it's		
2		not the case with this chap, say		
3		say for example that the parent had		
4		beaten the mother, you're still		
5		saying that the child should see that		
6		father?		
7	Woman 1	Yes I am yes		
8	John S	Yes		
9	Woman 2	why?		
10	Woman 1	Because I think it's important for the		
11		children - the mother		
12		and father	Bette	I've gorra butt in 'ere I mean
13		should keep their differences away		I have
14		from it all		
15	Woman 2	I agree with that completely that the		
16		parents erm agendas should not		
17		come into it that it should only be		
18		based on the child's welfare		
19	John S	Mary, you, you work in this field		
20	Man 1	yeh, yeh I-		
21	John S	-sorry		
22		I'm going to Mary first.		
23	Mary	Yes I'm President of the Network of		
24		Access and Child Contact		
25		Centres and I would echo		
26		what you say	Bette	[looks out of her window onto
27		because often the problem		the street]
28		Between two parents, not between the		we've got, we've got
29		parent and child and in contact centres		er two, three, four
30		we can actually keep the		we've got five
31		parents apart and I've seen a family		families in exactly
32		where they've come for years		the same situation



33	John S	[to woman 2] Would you consider	here exactly (.) Diane's
34		that?	husband is a
35	Woman 2	er my ex-partner and I have no	drunken alcoholic
36		problems with each other what-so-ever	drug-taking person
37			Sally's husband is
38	John S	He's happy with the arrangement?	er - he's got married
39	Woman 2	Well he understands it and accepts it	again- nice guy
40		and he is also aware of how	he just decided
41		Damaging his behaviour is	he wasn't avin
42	John S	But do you think Samuel will thank	anymore he just
43		you both- [both of you because you	decided one day
45	Woman 2	[erm we come to the same	well he was
46	John S	you're both	very much in
47	Woman 2	Decision erm that's one of the reasons	the minority ere
48		why I wanted to do this	because he's black
49		Programme because as I said to ( ?)	but 'e's a lovely
50		this is a very lonely decision and I can	man- 'e bent
51		only do what I feel in my heart	over backwards to
52		is best for my child I don't know.	welcome us into
53	John S	But you're doing what you think is	the avenue but
54		right.	he was so
55	Woman 2	I'm doing what I[think's right	isolated you know
56	John S	[Lady there and then	away from all
57		the gentleman here, yes	his - he came
58	Woman 3	Yes, you say that it's the <u>right</u> of a	from Wolverhampton
59		father to see a child well I don't	from a black area
60		believe being a parent is a right I think	to Forest Avenue
61		it's a role that we have to play,	where there are
62		it's not a right we have to that child we	few black people
63		its a role we have a huge	in Cannock you
64		Responsibility. It's the most vital role	know and I
656		we will play in life and erm being	thought 'God how
6		parent and giving a child	nice' cos I'm
67		Everything that they need, not what	not a bit racist
68		they want, what they need, should	at all you know
69		come naturally as should the ability to	I mean people

70		always put your child first	are all the same
71		because children are so	no matter
72		impressionable, they need to feel	what colour
73		secure, loved, wanted they need	they are (.)
74		emotional stability and most of all	Take that woman [woman 3]
75		they need love=	for instance
76	John S	= Does your child see	why:: if the
77		his or her father?	dads gone and
78	Woman 3	No, no now that's through his	pissed off and
79		choice he hasn't made contact	left her- you've
80		he's only ten months	gotta fill the
81	John S	Your partner's choice?	place of a father
82	Woman 4	yes to me that proves he's not a father	you know could
83		because as a father or a mother .hh you	you see 'er
84		have your child's	goin' playin' football
85		best interests at heart and if he loved	or takin' them
86		her and cared for her he	to the baths er er
87		would be there if there's anything my	on the pure
88		daughter needs he would be	assumption of
89		part of her life	just lookin' at
90	John S	You would like her to see him would	'er (.) Do you
91		you?	see what I'm
92	Woman 4	Well, erm now, now he's been away	gettin at? You
93		for so long I mean he has two	know you can
94		teenage children whose lives he's	fill the father's place.
95		walked in and out and in and out of	Sally plays
96		and those children- I mean the	out with the
97		emotional damage irreparable-	kids she plays
98		Unrepairable. You never get over	kickin' the football
99		things like that	and takes them everywhere
100	John S	So, are you saying that your, your	which is the way I'd have
101		child can do without this particular	had it you know.
102		dad?	Men I would
103	Woman 4	What I'm saying- I'm not saying a	(       ?       )
104		child doesn't need a father if a man	that's because I'm
105		knows how to be a good father and	gay I mean I've

106	puts the child before himself and gives	gotta get that
107	the child what she or he	over to you
108	needs then a child should have a father	I don't know if
109	but until Adrienne's father	Julie told ya
110	is capable of giving her what she	I can see things
111	needs, putting her before himself,	different that's
112	giving ti- being available	why if these women
113	Whether it's	they- I mean I love
114	six hundred mile away or in the	kids- but I can
115	same house until he's capable of doing	see:: where they're
116	that erm I don't want him to	goin' wrong
117	the damage to her that he's done to	(2)
118	his other two children	
119		Exactly!

Bette feels strongly about the discussion and suggests that she has to 'butt in', indicating her involvement as though she were directly interrupting the conversation, participating in the studio discussion. Her recourse to her own experience is marked by visually looking out of the window and by beginning to describe the families in her street who she suggests compare to the personal dilemmas related in the studio. Here we see the discursive blurring of the televised text and her local life.

Bette represents her neighbour Diane's husband extremely negatively (lines 33/34), but she extends sympathy to another absent father, Sally's husband (lines 37-50). This is based upon Bette's construction of her own identity. Sally's husband welcomed Bette and her partner into the street when they arrived and she describes his circumstances as a black man living in a predominantly white area. Bette then



constructs herself as 'not a racist' and then quite abruptly shifts back to the televised discussion, 'take that woman for instance' (line 74). She then continues with her positioning of her own opinion in terms of the debate - that when fathers leave, mothers can fill their traditional role in the family (lines 76-102). The significance of her relationship with Sally's husband arises when she tells me that she is gay (lines 104/105). Thus the welcome into the street is potentially a marker of an affinity, both realising a marginalised position with the street. But this is also significant to the construction of Bette's own identity in relation to the televised discussion about conventional family life where Bette reveals that she can see 'things different' (lines 110/111) and can identify where people are going wrong. Outside culturally conceived conventions of traditional family life, Bette constructs herself as a knowing onlooker. This particular interactive moment is closed by Bette's emphatic response to the woman in the studio who suggests that she doesn't want her children to be hurt, which Bette supports, 'EXACTLY'.

This transcript is a good example of the mediated conversational practice described in the thesis as serving as a forum for the reproduction of personal identity. As a gay woman Bette provides her own contextualised reading of the debate in response to the relational invitation to the text. It represents an explicit example of what is occurring in other chapters where women use the programmes to work through aspects of their own identities as mothers, wives, carers etc.. Layers of personal experience complexly imbricate with the texts' discourses. Bette's construction of

herself in this instance is realised through the media's role as a communicative event.

What I am suggesting here is that this approach to research can reveal interesting dimensions of the way in which the media's 'dailiness' can be embedded within the very 'ordinary' process of identity construction. It is a modern reflexive making of the self (Giddens, 1991) through which gender is experienced and reproduced. Thus this research offers an analysis of the discursive relationship between a particular broadcast genre and specific social subjects which opens the way for potentially new methods of explaining the media's role in identity construction through the complex 'interaction mixes of daily life' (Moore, 2000:149).

As the use of Bette's transcript in this conclusion demonstrates, this research not only highlights *commonalities* in women's interactions with morning television but also demonstrates the *specificities* of the women's personal investments and identity construction. It presents a reading of the interaction between a particular genre and particular women at a particular time. As I have indicated throughout, these findings cannot be used to make generalised assumptions about *all* women, or even to categorically state that the strategies discovered here are the reserve of female experience. However, the methodological innovations presented in this study can be used to further investigate localised contexts of media consumption and identity construction.

## Appendix

### Transcription Conventions<sup>1</sup>

(     )	If empty, indicates indecipherable utterance; otherwise, best guess at what was said.
[ <b>bold</b> ]	Verbal description of non-verbal behaviour
(2.0)	Latency between or within utterances in seconds
word-	Word is cut off abruptly
(.)	Brief, untimed pause within or between utterances.
=	Latching together separate parts of a continuous utterance or indicating that B's utterance follows A's with no gaps or overlap.
[	Point at which overlap occurs between speakers.
<u>word</u>	Stress added to word or syllable.
WORD	Extreme stress.
co::lons	Stretching of a vowel or consonant sound.
↑	Rising intonation.
↓	Falling intonation.
'	Brief pause at a syntactically relevant point in the utterance.
.hh	Audible inhalation.
hh	Audible exhalation.
heh	Laugh token
!	Excited intonation.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from conventions used in Scannell (1991).



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